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HOPE MEREDITH.

VOL. III.

HOPE MEREDITH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,”

“THE BLUE RIBBON,”

&c. &c.

“A mien and face
In which full plainly I can trace
Benignity and home-bred sense,
Ripening in perfect innocence.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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HOPE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

MADOLIN stayed in the library until half an hour after Mac had started for Nunthorpe station. Then all danger was over. He would not come back. She heard the distant railway whistle, looked at the little clock on the mantelpiece—a quarter to nine. Yes, it was all right. That was Mac's train. She rang the bell.

“Captain Cayley was in time, I suppose,” she said, as Colin answered her summons.

“He started so very early.”

“Yes, ma’am. Bowles is back. The Captain was a quarter of an hour too soon.”

“That will do.”

Then my lady went into the pleasant dining-room, looking out upon the terrace, where summer twilight lay upon the flowers. And in the elm-trees near at hand the blackbirds piped, and far off, from the fir plantation, the solitary sweet note of the cushat-dove was heard.

So still and peaceful—no more strife, no more storm; and the great fear passed which had vexed her soul for many a day. Away beyond the moorland slopes was a red gleam, as of Summer lightning, and a distant murmur of thunder mingled with the rustling of the leaves and the even song of the birds; but very distant, serving only to make the nearer peace more peaceful.

Ten o’clock; and the Chase housekeeper came, with her armful of Short Family Devotions.

"We will not have prayers to-night," said my lady, folding her white hands listlessly the while. "I am tired."

The housekeeper curtsied and withdrew.

Midnight, and my lady sat in the moonshine at her oriel window. And most calm and gracious she looked, with silver ripples of light upon her white raiment, and braided net-work of silver, more dainty than Indian craftsman ever wrought, gleaming to and fro upon her loosened hair. And still, far off, a flush of summer lightning in the grey horizon, and a murmur of summer thunder beyond the moorland slopes, enough—no more—to make the nearer peace more peaceful.

"For I am safe," she whispered softly to herself—"quite safe."

Next morning, a little before noon, she

dressed herself in her usual walking-dress, and went out into the park. Going across the terrace, she met the housekeeper, and started like a guilty creature.

“Bennet, I did not expect to have seen you here so early.”

“No, ma’am, you are out betimes.”

“Because I am going over to Brighton this afternoon, and I wanted a few flowers. Besides, the air in the house is so oppressive.”

“It is, ma’am, and you’re not so strong as you used to be. You would hear of poor Tossie, ma’am, last night.”

“Ah! yes, and so the poor girl must go to the hospital—perhaps for a long time.”

“Yes, ma’am, and the best place too for such as she, that wants a tight hand keeping over them. It wasn’t my place to speak, ma’am, or I could have told you of her being seen in the park with a man that’s

been here taking pictures of the place ; and he don't seem one that's likely to do her any good, for all Jacob Lund, who's a good-hearted man, let him into the house many a time to light his cigar, and maybe that was the beginning of it. So, for as bad as it seems, ma'am, her broken shoulder may be the saving of her."

"It may be, Bennet. Good morning."

"Good morning, ma'am."

And Madolin swept proudly on. That sting, too, she must bear, like all the rest, in silence.

At a turning in one of the closest woodland paths she met Jetsam.

"You look as if you'd done it," he said, with a single glance into her bright, calm, uplifted face.

"And I have done it. Here is your price." And she handed him the money, just as she had taken it out of the drawer.

He took it, thrust the sheet of paper into one of his side-pockets, counted the notes carefully over, and laid them in his purse.

“Yes—all right. With what you gave me the other time, there’s a pound or two over.”

“That is of no consequence. I am free now. You promise never to let me see you or hear of you again.”

“Never. I’m off to New Zealand or America—it doesn’t signify which; and if once I can get a fair start, bygones shall be bygones. I don’t want to trouble you again. Goodness knows I have troubled you enough already.”

“Yes.”

“You are a brave woman. Have you had any work to get the money?”

“That is my affair,” she said coldly, standing erect, firm, like a statue of marble, and looking into his face. “You have your

price—that is all you have to think about.”

“Nay, not quite all. If you got it in such a way that anyone may miss it, the numbers may be stopped, and I may be worse off than ever.”

Madolin shivered with an inward spasm of loathing—not for him, but for herself. Thief! But never mind. For a week at any rate that chest would be untouched.

“You need not fear,” she said. “If you go away at once, you are quite safe. Take your passage at once, to-day, to-morrow. If you wait longer, it is your own fault.”

“I will not wait, then.”

“And once more you promise me that I am perfectly free.”

“I will promise you never to trouble you again. And when my time comes, I’ll tell them it’s to be copied in the English papers, so that you may hear of it. I can’t do more than that. I’ve had rather a hard life, and

maybe it won't be a long one ; but still one likes to stick to it and make it tolerably comfortable whilst it lasts. So good-bye, Madolin."

" Good-bye."

She turned away from him with a strange mingling of scorn and pity, and now a sort of sympathy, for wherein was he so much worse than herself? Save that he had looked perhaps with asking eyes into Tossie's face. Once more she turned.

" You have not been always alone in this park," she said.

Jetsam smiled.

" I know what you mean. I wanted to hear about you, that was all. You need not suspect me. If I am bad, I am not all bad. I can be as proud as you are yourself. You may as well shake hands with me before you go away."

Shake hands with *him* ! What sorer

humiliation for proud Miss Lauderdale? Yes, there was one sorer, that she did not dare to refuse this final disgrace ; neither in look, tone, nor gesture might she tell him of her scorn for the man who had once deceived, and now tyrannised, over her. No money could free her from his power, if once she exposed herself to his ill-will. He was her master, and even whilst she hated, she must be meek to him.

Very slowly she turned and gave him her gloved hand.

“No, Madolin, I will not have that ; take your glove off.”

She took it off, and laid her soft cold fingers in the convict’s palm.

“Good-bye. Then I am free now?”

“Yes, quite free now. I will never trouble you again.”

He crossed down into a wide path leading to the lodge. Madolin turned home-

wards. On the terrace she saw a little pony-carriage, its silver trappings gleaming in the sun. Those delightful Regisons had come to call. Then she must keep out of sight. Half an hour of their chatter was rather more than she could bear just at present; so she sat on the root of a tree, and watched Jetsam as he paced slowly down the lodge road, very slowly, counting his money all the way.

He turned into the lodge, came out and chatted for a while with Mrs. Lund at the door, hearing about Tossie, most likely, and her accident. But that would be of little consequence to him. He had got what he wanted now; the merry little chattering girl could serve his purposes no longer. By-and-by he went in again, came out with a lighted cigar in his mouth, and Mrs. Lund unlocked the great iron gates for him. He was gone at last, to come back never again, never again.

Madolin rose, stretched herself like one desperately weary, and went slowly back to the house. She need fear no longer now ; the worst was passed. Those little white fingers washed, she was a lady again before all the world.

And now let Mac look to it. If he need fear no more, and if his worst was passed, well for him.

CHAPTER II.

IN the afternoon Miss Lauderdale started for Brighton, telling Bennet that she might possibly return at the beginning of the week.

“You know, dear Auntie Grisel,” she said, after that good lady’s surprise at her sudden appearance had worked itself partly off, “I thought I must come and give you my congratulations in person. One does not hear of such engagements every day; and I declare you are looking ever so much younger already. The Colonel must be quite proud of you.”

Miss Griselda arranged her cap-strings with a complacent air.

“You will have an opportunity of deciding that for yourself to-night, my dear. He comes in every evening after dinner, so very attentive, and such a delightfully protecting manner, and takes everything off my hands so kindly. I do wish, Madolin, I could impress upon you the advisability of following my example. It would be such a relief to your dear papa and myself to find that you had fixed your affections upon a suitable object.”

“Thank you, auntie. I shall be very glad to fix them when a suitable object presents itself. At present, I assure you, the spaniels and peacocks possess my undivided heart. You can’t think how magnificent that sweet creature’s tail is just now. Emeralds and diamonds are not to be compared with it.”

“Madolin, my dear, it distresses me to hear you talk with such frivolity when marriage is the subject of our conversation. You know if anything should happen to your papa—although Colonel Dewar says in the kindest manner possible that he should always be glad to offer you a home with us, still——”

“Yes, still. I quite see it—it would be a great deal more satisfactory to have one of my own. And I don’t think that Regency Square and my beloved spaniels and peacocks would agree together. But you talk as if papa were quite ill. I suppose there is nothing seriously the matter with him? What do the doctors say?”

“Oh! nothing serious—a gradual breaking up, which may continue for years, and a few of the symptoms which sometimes precede paralysis, so that one must be prepared for emergencies. The physicians seem to

think he must have had a slight attack once or twice before. Really, my dear, I cannot help wishing you would have patience with Mac, and give the poor fellow a little more encouragement. You know he can't do with anything overpowering; but he is an excellent fellow, and if he could get something to do in England, you might live at the Chase as comfortably as could be, during the remainder of Sir David's lifetime."

"A very nice arrangement, auntie, thank you, but I fancy Mac does not see it quite in that light. I believe he is engaged to Hope Meredith."

"My dear!"

And Miss Griselda's face expressed the indignation she could not speak.

"Yes, I believe he is. They were both at the Chase yesterday morning. He met her at Mrs. Clay's house, and brought her

up to see me. His way of announcing it, I suppose. I said something to her, but of course she only blushed and looked uncomfortable. Never mind, auntie. It is all right. I told you from the first that it would be very likely to end so. I think they are quite suited to each other."

"Such unheard-of presumption! Well, all I can say about it is that Captain Cayley need not come to *this* house again."

"Oh! but he *is* coming, auntie, and to borrow money of papa, too. He wants to take up some shares, and the deposits are due next week, and then he is going off at once to Canada—as soon, at least, as he can find a ship to take him."

Miss Griselda arranged her curls at the mirror, and put a few finishing touches to her bows and ribbons before she made any reply. The Colonel was expected in about half an hour. That accounted for the

finishing touches, but it did not account for the dubious expression which gradually spread itself over Miss Griselda's virgin features,—expression deepening by-and-by into positive unpleasantness.

“Borrowing money of Sir David? Oh! indeed. And you think it is to take up some shares?”

“He said so, auntie.”

Miss Griselda coughed, put another ringlet straight, coughed again. Madolin, amusing herself by dusting the leaves of a geranium in the window, watched her aunt keenly. The conversation was working its desired effect. Instead of having to raise a spirit of opposition to poor Mac, she might now subside into passiveness—even speak a word for him now and then, which she knew well enough would only intensify the opposition. The announcement of his supposed engagement to Hope Meredith had

been quite enough. That little touch of acid, dropped into the alkali of Miss Griselda's previous kindness towards Captain Cayley, might safely be left to work its own effects.

Which it did speedily enough.

"Shares, indeed ! Are you quite sure, my dear, that you understood him rightly ? I should say pecuniary embarrassments would be nearer the mark."

"Oh ! auntie, don't be hard upon him. What makes you think so ?"

"Because I have noticed a great change in him of late. I did set it down to a little anxiety which he might naturally be feeling about his position and prospects, not having the slightest doubt in my own mind that he wished to see things a little more clearly before he mentioned his intentions to you. But as his entanglement with the girl Hope Meredith has put that entirely out of the

question, and as he is leaving the country in such haste, I choose to assign his altered behaviour to an entirely different cause."

"Come, come, auntie, there is no need why he should not marry Hope Meredith, if he likes her. You know she is really a very pleasant girl."

"Of course, my dear. I have nothing against her," said Aunt Griselda, who had suddenly vaulted to the conclusion that poor Uncle Mac, instead of being a suitable partner for her own niece, was little better than a penniless adventurer. "If Miss Meredith is willing to risk her future happiness upon such an uncertain foundation, no one has any right to find fault with her; but we must have an understanding about these money affairs. You say he is coming here to-morrow night, for the purpose of borrowing something from your papa."

“Yes, auntie. I suppose papa has plenty of money. It will not make much difference to him, letting Mac have a few hundreds.”

“My dear, that is another question altogether. I am looking at it as a matter of justice.”

Here Aunt Griselda assumed an aspect of more than cast-iron rigidity.

“I should consider that, under present circumstances, your papa would be doing Captain Cayley a positive unkindness by advancing him money.”

“Auntie, if you look like that when Colonel Dewar comes, I am sure you will frighten him away again. Why, you might stand for a model of Nemesis, only I don’t believe she generally wears those delightful little point-lace caps; or Juno, when she had revenged herself upon Dido for something—no, not Dido, it was that other

woman who wept herself all away, and then turned to stone, I think ; and I am not quite sure if it was Juno either, but, at any rate, you are representing Justice in her severest aspect. If it were not for those sweetly pretty mauve ribbons, I should shrink from you in dismay. What *has* poor Mac been doing, to make you so angry with him ?”

“Nothing at all, my dear. I am only indignant that he should come here borrowing money on pretence of taking up shares, when in reality it is to rid himself of the consequences of his own extravagance. If, indeed——” and Aunt Griselda’s voice dropped to a mysterious undertone —“if, indeed, he has not wasted his money in even more disreputable ways. I believe gambling debts are very easily contracted by young men, especially strangers in London. And this abrupt departure,

coupled with the fact of pecuniary embarrassment, leaves little doubt upon my mind as to the real state of the case."

"Well, auntie, all I can say about it is, that you should really keep your poor geraniums in better order. Here have I been dusting the leaves of this wretched creature for the last quarter of an hour, and I verily believe a human soul is imprisoned in it, for I almost feel it thanking me. Even Colonel Dewar should not make you guilty of cruelty to plants. You see, you have been concentrating your affections upon him, until you have none left for destitute flowers, and I have been obliged to come all the way from Nunthorpe to restore you to a sense of your duty."

"I hope, my dear Madolin, I shall always see my duty and act up to it," said Aunt Griselda, with dignity, for she did not like Madolin's bantering moods. "I only wish

I could make you see yours as clearly."

"What is it, auntie? Show it to me. I am sure I will look most attentively. Just now I can only see that the point of your cap is slightly out of the perpendicular, and Colonel Dewar will be here so soon."

"My dear, be serious. I wish you to speak to your papa about this money."

"I speak to papa, auntie?" But there was a curiously mingled smile on Madolin's face all the while. "You know he never talks to me about business."

"Because you never talk to him about it. You can put things clearly enough before him when you choose, for I must say that your intellect is far above the average. You ought then to represent the state of the case to him about Captain Cayley, and warn him against being imposed upon by any excuses about these shares."

"Aunt Grisel, you seem to have changed

your opinion very much about Uncle Mac. Why, only half an hour ago you called him a nice, honest fellow."

"So I did, Madolin, but light has dawned upon me since then. I am seldom mistaken in my first impressions of people. If you remember, Miss Meredith and I met Captain Cayley unawares in the park, and my firm conviction was that he was a trespasser. Of course I modified my opinion afterwards, but you see the result proves me to be correct."

Madolin could not help laughing at her aunt's triumphant logic. There was a ring in her laugh not all of amusement. This conversation had been very successful. Aunt Grisel was turned to be Mac's enemy, and fought against him. If she could only be as successful with Sir David, if the little drop of acid only worked as well in his cloudy, confused mind, precipitating trust,

and leaving clearness only for suspicion to work in, why then, when that drawer in the iron chest came to be opened, it might go hard with Mac.

“Well,” she said, turning listlessly away from the window, “I suppose I must do what you wish, and go and have a talk with papa. Can he see me now, or is he asleep?”

“No, I think I hear him stirring in his room. This is the time that the maid brings him the cup of tea after his nap, so that you could not do better than go in now.”

And Madolin went.

CHAPTER III.

SHE had not much difficulty in working her will there. Sir David was in that feeble state of health when impressions are easily made upon the mind. Moreover, he had been chafing for some time under his obligations to Uncle Mac. He had his daughter's intolerance of anything less than absolute supremacy. To acknowledge a favour from those whom he could pet and patronize in return was all very well ; but to be dependent upon services which could not be paid for and cancelled by gold, was a burden to him. He was beginning to have the same sort of feeling towards Mac that

Madolin had once had towards Hope Meredith, before the deeper element of hatred mingled with it; resistance against favours which, being given out of good-will, brought him under that yoke of gratitude which the Lauderdales were ever eager to break from off their necks.

So that Madolin's subtle poison fell into an ear already prepared for it. She told him of the conversation between Aunt Griselda and herself. With just such a leaning towards Mac's side as prevented her from any show of spitefulness, she yet so delicately touched in the darker shades of possibility as to make his conduct look very suspicious. Perhaps all the time he had only been serving Sir David as a cloak for obtaining this money from him. Perhaps he had been taking such pains in balancing up accounts, just to discover whether any spare cash might be available for him. At

any rate, it looked rather awkward that he should be hurrying away so unexpectedly, just a week or two before his Canadian remittances came in ; and she suggested that things had better be inquired into a little before any advance was made.

Miss Griselda, coming in as the conference was over, added her weight to the scale ; and the result was that when Mac came over from London next day, he met with rather a cold reception. Sir David listened to all he had to say, agreed with him that the shares were a most desirable investment, but asked to consider the matter for a day or two before giving a final answer.

Most likely Aunt Griselda and Madolin were right. The young man had been getting into difficulties. Nothing was easier than that sort of thing for a stranger in London ; and it would account for a good deal of Mac's anxiety and depression of

late. But it would have been better if he had frankly confessed his folly, and that he had been led into temptation, and begged Sir David, as a boon, to extricate him from it. But to come under the guise of a business transaction, to shift from himself the unpleasant necessity of confession by pretending that he wanted the money for additional investments—that was mean, that was unworthy. Sir David must see more clearly to the end of the chapter before he would advance a sixpence on such security as that. Not that he wished the young man ill—nothing of the sort. In fact it would be the truest kindness to make him feel his folly, and, when the sting had entered deeply enough, come forward with relief.

So Sir David said very kindly, but a little pompously, that he did not see his way clearly towards advancing the money; but he would take a few of the shares himself,

and then perhaps at some future time turn them over to his young friend.

So now Mac only needed to go to London, take his passage in the most convenient ship he could find, and then come back to Regency Square to take his leave, after which Sir David and Aunt Griselda and Madolin were to return to the Chase.

It was the last evening, and they were all gathered together with Colonel Dewar in the snug little drawing-room which had been the scene of so many quiet games of cribbage between the excellent elderly couple. Mac looked, as they all noticed, rather moody and out of sorts. Poor fellow! it was not quite such a pleasant going away as he had expected. A cloud seemed to hang over the whole party. Sir David retired to his easy-chair and slept. Madolin amused them with occasional sallies of gaiety, but in the intervals of these her

manner was forced and cold. Miss Griselda was in one of her most sententious moods. Every phrase that she uttered was thickly coated with wisdom for Mac's special benefit. She hoped his visit to England had not taught him any expensive tastes. She rather regretted that he had been obliged to spend so much time in London, that not being at all a safe place for young men. Perhaps it was a good thing, after all, that he was going home a little sooner than he expected, for she should think out in Canada he would find less difficulty in taking care of his money; with many more little side hits of the same kind, which somewhat puzzled Mac, who, now that the business of the shares had been decided, had no further difficulties that he knew of.

"On Thursday I think you sail, do you not, Captain Cayley?" said the Colonel.

"Yes, next Thursday," said Mac, rather

gruffly, "and glad enough I shall be to get safely away."

"I daresay. Packing up is a troublesome business, and there are always so many little matters to attend to just at the last. I don't think I remember the name of your vessel. I asked you once before, but I think some other remark prevented your answer."

"The *Paragon*; a good sort of ship, I believe."

"Indeed! I don't know the name. Steamer, perhaps?"

"No; sailing vessel."

Mac shook himself. He was always rather restive under catechism, and the old Colonel plodded on so methodically through his questions.

"Sailing vessel. Ah! then perhaps you may be detained a day or two. I believe people are often disappointed about the time of starting in those sailing vessels."

"Then I hope I shan't be. I should consider it a great nuisance to be kept in England a day longer, now."

"Ah! Then you should have made sure that the ship's people were under an engagement to keep to their time. I really forget again the name of the ship."

"The *Paragon*."

"Ah, yes! I recollect now. And the captain; I don't remember if you told me his name."

"Captain Ross," said Mac; and then he abruptly turned the conversation. Shortly afterwards he went away, saying he had some business to attend to in the town.

Miss Griselda thought she could understand his irritability. Money difficulties; that was it. That application about the shares had just been an excuse for getting himself tided over the sand-bar of debt. She hoped he was not leaving any of

his creditors unpaid. It looked very like it, being so anxious to get away, and so unwilling to say anything about the vessel in which he had taken his passage ; its very name had to be almost dragged out of him, and he left the room to avoid having to say anything more about it. Poor young man ! she was really very sorry for him ; but it was all his own fault. If people would allow themselves to be led into temptation, they must take the consequences.

By-and-by Mac came in, to say he found it necessary to go to London that night, to look after some packages which he expected ; and so he took his leave of the Lauderdales with a certain impatient relief at being free from the cloud of misconception which seemed to have suddenly gathered over him there. He went to his London hotel, and found that the packages could not possibly arrive until late on the following

day. He did not care to go back to Brighton for a second farewell. A strange longing came over him to see Nunthorpe Chase once more ; to stand in the little woodland path where he had first met Hope Meredith ; to listen to the ripple of the brook by whose mossy banks she had sat with him.

So early in the morning he set off, taking the first train that stopped at Nunthorpe, and before the dewdrops had dried on the terrace flowers, he was strolling down the avenue, recalling to his memory each spot where some pleasant word had been spoken, or sweet, shy, half-unconscious look given ; and then away to the woodland path, and to the brook by the willow-trees, where he loitered, thinking, dreaming, remembering, so long that at last, looking at his watch, he found that he had barely time to catch his return train to London.

Just a flower or two he gathered, and then strode hastily away, through tangled fern and bramble, into a near cut across the fields, where he met Mrs. Bennet, the Chase housekeeper, bringing home a basket of mushrooms. He had no time to speak to her, only just gave her a hasty nod, and hurried away to the station, where he caught the train; and was back in London in time for his business.

He thought those little flowers were the only memento he should carry from the Chase, but when he had taken possession of his cabin in the *Paragon*, and was arranging his things, he found the key of Sir David's strong box in his waistcoat pocket. He had put it there that night when he was showing Madolin the accounts, intending to give it to Sir David. There was just time to send it back by the pilot, to be posted to Brighton, and accordingly he wrote a note,

explaining how he had forgotten to give it up, and hoping that the delay would not cause Sir David any inconvenience. The pilot posted the letter, but the Lauderdale had left Brighton for Nunthorpe Chase an hour or two before it arrived, and so there was a delay of another day, by which time the *Paragon*, if all had gone well with her, ought to have been far out to sea, with many a mile between her and the troubles which Mac thought to have left behind him in England.

CHAPTER IV.

THE morning after Sir David and his family, with Colonel Dewar, arrived at the Chase, the letter reached them, sent on from Regency Square.

“Rather peculiar,” said Aunt Griselda. “Mac is not generally so forgetful. I think we had better open the chest and see that everything is right.”

“Aunt Grisel ! how can you propose such a thing ? You are really most uncharitable to the poor fellow. One might think we had been nursing a viper in our bosoms for the last four months.”

“So we may have been, my dear, for anything we know to the contrary. Since that wretched affair at Heidelberg, I have never had the least——”

But at the mention of that wretched affair at Heidelberg, Madolin turned impatiently away, and, tying on her hat, went out into the garden, leaving Aunt Griselda and Sir David to settle matters.

Which they did by opening the iron box in the library writing-table, and looking in its little drawer for the roll of notes. There were none !

Sir David gazed at Aunt Griselda—Aunt Griselda gazed at Sir David ; then they both of them gazed at the empty drawer.

“There is something wrong here,” said Sir David, bending his heavy brows, and growing very red.

“Very wrong indeed,” replied Miss Griselda ; “but, as I was saying to Madolin before

we left Brighton, when once a young man takes to wrong courses, there is no telling where they may lead him in the end."

"Griselda, you don't mean to say——"

"Yes, David, I do mean to say; and what is more, I am not at all surprised at it either. And when I come to think about Mac's behaviour, it is as clear as daylight to me. Did he not tell you so very particularly that the box would not need to be opened until to-day, and that you had better not meddle with it before? And if he had the key in his pocket when he was saying all that to you, and explaining about the accounts, why did he not give it to you then? It was impossible—utterly impossible—that he should have forgotten it. David, you have been robbed by the man whom you have entertained as a guest!"

Sir David trembled; his breath came thick and fast; he tottered to the nearest chair.

“Griselda, it is monstrous! How can you suggest such a thing? Do you think, if the man had taken all this money away, he would have come and asked me for more? He would have gone quietly off with it, and said nothing about his difficulties.”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Miss Griselda, meekly.

And then she bustled about the room, lifting up chair cushions, peeping under footstools, behind curtains, into corners—anywhere, indeed, where it was possible, or impossible, that rolls of bank-notes might be lying. Though really, if the good lady had found them, it is doubtful if she would not have been a little disappointed. It was almost worth a thousand pounds—especially a thousand pounds of some one else’s money—to be able to prove so triumphantly her own perception of character.

“There is some mistake,” said Sir David. “I can’t believe it of the man. He has removed the money, and forgotten to tell me where he put it.”

“The notes are most likely where he found the key, my dear David—in his own pocket. I can see it all as clearly as possible. And sending the key on to Brighton, too, when he knew we should have gone away. It was just a trick to give himself more time. I must say, he has managed the whole thing very cleverly. I am very sorry for you—it is uncommonly annoying!”

“Don’t talk about annoying,” said Sir David, impatiently. “Dear me! my head is getting very confused! Ask Dewar to come to me; he will think of something to do. And Bowles must take the carriage over to Matchborough at once, for my solicitor.”

“Of course.” And Miss Griselda bustled

away to the Colonel, feeling like a person of unusual discernment.

As if anybody might not have seen from the first what that Captain Cayley was after!

And Madolin sauntered leisurely down the avenue, enjoying as much as might be the fresh summer breeze, watching the bands of light and shadow which lay athwart the great elm-trees. No need to startle now at sudden sight or sound. The lodge-keeper might be told now to let no strangers in. Any more stray photographers, with pictures to sell, might be told that Miss Lauderdale had no use for their wares. She did not even look surprised when, turning towards the moorland slope to get more into the open air, she met Bennet with her mushroom basket.

“You are always at work, Bennet; you never let the grass grow under your feet.”

“No, ma’am : but I wish the mushrooms would grow under them a bit quicker. I’ve been out ever since nine o’clock for this little few, and I like to gather them myself, for then I know what I get. It’s everything, if you want your ketchup good, to pick them at the right time ; if only those tiresome children wasn’t always beforehand with me, I believe they sit up all night to be ready for stealing.”

“That is too bad ! I suppose they creep through the hedges without being seen.”

“Yes, ma’am, that’s just it. I was going to say to the Captain when he was here the day before yesterday—”

“Nay, Bennet ; not the day before yesterday. He was getting ready to go on board his ship then.”

“No, ma’am ; begging your pardon, it was that very day, and a bit before this time, too, I was pulling mushrooms in the ten-

acre field, and he came racing past, down from the house way, as hard as ever he could go. I was wanting to tell him something must be done to stop those children, but there was no such thing as getting speech of him, he was in such a hurry; off to the station, he said, and good need to be, too, for the train was just upon its time."

"Indeed! How strange! I suppose he had forgotten something."

"I don't know, ma'am. Maybe he didn't come to the house, as Colin said he hadn't seen him when I got back. He'll be a deal missed here, ma'am, for he was that sort as could put his hand to anything, and always to depend upon."

"Yes, but I must go on and take my walk, or the sun will be so hot."

"Yes, ma'am, I might have thought of that, but maybe you would speak to Sir David yourself about the children getting

through the hedges. There'll scarce be a bottle of ketchup for us this year, and him so particular about it for the made dishes."

"If I can think of it, Bennet. Good morning."

Bennet curtseyed. Madolin did not go towards the moorland slope though, but turned back down the avenue, where she met Miss Griselda hurrying along with portentous aspect.

"My dear, I have been looking for you this half-hour past. It is as I expected, just as I expected. The drawer is empty. I leave you to account for the rest yourself. I only say what I think."

"I have just met Bennet," said Madolin, carelessly, "and she says Uncle Mac was here the day before yesterday. She met him in one of the fields, going off to the station as fast as ever he could. Strange, is it not? And he never told us he was

coming. We fancied he was in London, you know."

Miss Griselda performed a series of emphatic nods, which expressed volumes. Madolin bored little holes in the ground with the end of her parasol, and pushed dead leaves into them, and filled them up again.

"Well, my dear."

"Well, auntie. I suppose you want me to go back to the house and inquire about things. The money has really gone, has it?"

"You had better come and look for yourself, my dear. You seem to take it remarkably quietly. I have no doubt at all now where it is."

"Have you not? Uncle Mac may have put it somewhere else, and forgotten to tell papa."

"Just the very thing that he has done.

Most certainly he *has* put it somewhere else, and I think intentionally forgotten to tell papa. If he was down here the day before yesterday, that clears up the whole matter. I wonder we did not suspect something when he was so mysterious about the name of the ship."

"What is papa doing?"

"He is talking to Colonel Dewar about it. I did not stay to hear, for I wanted to come and tell you, and Bowles is to be sent with the carriage to Matchborough for Mr. Scoles. Of course something must be done at once. And poor David in such a state of excitement about it; no wonder either, for he must know how it has gone, though he does not like to say so."

"Some one ought to communicate with the agents of the vessel, and they would telegraph to the American port."

"A very good thought, Madolin. Yes,

that must be mentioned to Mr. Scoles, if he does not suggest it himself. No doubt that was why he left the key to the very last, and then sent it back in that way, as if he knew nothing at all about it. I daresay he thought Sir David would not take the trouble to make inquiries. Such perfidious conduct! And when we had behaved to him like one of our own family, and showed him every possible attention! It really reminds me of that horrid fellow Jetsam."

Madolin, burying the little dead leaves, had no word to say. Surely her work was done now, and well done, too. She had released herself from a terrible burden, and at the same time wreaked her vengeance upon the man who had slighted her, and the girl whose sweetness had won the prize which her own beauty would fain have brought to its feet. Her life destroyed past hope of healing, what should she do but

kindle firebrands of destruction from it for others ?

“I think you said papa would send for Mr. Scoles.”

“Yes ; and then something decided will be done. Of course Scoles will not rest until the affair has been sifted to the bottom. It may be a great expense, much more than the value of the money, but then justice ought to be satisfied.”

“Nemesis again, dear auntie, only in a garden bonnet this time. Not so pretty as the point-lace cap, I must say. Then is papa very vexed about it ?”

“Yes ; and it is evidently having an effect upon him. Which I am sorry for, as the physician at Brighton told us we were to be very careful to avoid anything which might excite him unpleasantly.”

This was an issue which Madolin had not considered. She only thought of releasing

herself and punishing those she hated. If her scheme should end fatally for one whom she meant to be untouched by it, what then? But Aunt Griselda had a way of making the most of things.

“Let us go back to the house and talk about it there, auntie.”

CHAPTER V.

IN due time Mr. Scoles arrived, and was closeted with Sir David and Colonel Dewar for a private conversation in the library.

An unpleasant affair, the lawyer said, after Colonel Dewar had explained to him all that was known at present. Facts certainly did seem to look very dark against Captain Cayley ; though without the most ample proofs Sir David would never think of taking action against a man of such character and position. The only thing that could be done at present, after having had

the servants of the establishment rigorously questioned, was to send a clerk to London, to the offices of the company, in one of whose vessels Captain Cayley had sailed, to ascertain his exact destination, so that letters might be despatched by the next steamer, both to him and suitable agents, stating what had occurred, and desiring an explanation. If none were forthcoming, proceedings must be set on foot at once.

The tide of evidence, as far as they could follow it, Mr. Scoles said, flowed very strongly in the direction of Captain Cayley. He had acknowledged himself to be in pecuniary difficulties. He had suddenly, and without any apparent reason for so doing, hurried away from the country. He had appeared unwilling to tell the name of the ship, or the exact time of his departure—indeed, upon the whole subject he had maintained a silence which was unusual in

a man of his open disposition. Added to this, he had had the management of Sir David's money matters—the key of the iron safe had been in his keeping. He, and he only, had free access to it. He had been known to shut it on a certain evening, to pocket the key, promising to give it to Sir David. Instead of doing that, he had taken it away with him, and only returned it with an excuse about forgetfulness, when, as he thought, there was no chance of inquiry being made. Moreover, to secure himself still more, he had told Sir David that the chest would not need to be opened until a certain day, that day being after the vessel had sailed; and thus he had eluded the necessity of an immediate explanation.

All this looked very dark; indeed, when all the facts were laid side by side, there was little doubt how the money had gone.

There was only one thing in his favour. If he had taken the money on the night of his journey to London, why should he have made application to Sir David for assistance? He had already abstracted enough to relieve him from his difficulties, and to ask for more would only be to raise suspicion. If the money had been taken after the application, the case would have been much more clear. Now, though it was very suspicious, a link still seemed wanting in the chain of evidence.

The conference had reached this stage, when Aunt Griselda came in, weighted with her most important piece of information. Captain Cayley had been at the Chase again, quite early in the morning of the day on which his friends supposed him to be arranging his affairs in London. He had stated his intentions to no one, nor would his presence ever have been suspected, if

the housekeeper, Mrs. Bennet, had not met him, quite early in the morning, hastening across one of the Chase fields to catch the first return train to London. He looked exceedingly flurried and discomposed, would not stop to speak to her or answer her inquiries after Sir David's health, but vaulted over a stile, and was away out of sight almost before she could be sure that she had seen him at all.

Then Mr. Scoles looked very grave. That seemed to clinch the whole argument. He was disposed to think now that Sir David would need to take very speedy and decided action. There was little doubt how the money had gone. Possibly Captain Cayley might not have intended to steal it in the absolute sense of the word ; he might have taken it to relieve himself from his immediate difficulties, intending, when his next remittances were due, to return it, saying that it

had been taken by mistake, or something of that sort. It was possible to put such a face upon the transaction, though Mr. Scoles must confess it was almost too satisfactory to be admitted.

“A painful affair—a very painful affair,” said the lawyer, as he rose to depart, having jotted down the leading facts of the case; “but you may rely, Sir David, on my best endeavours to bring it to a satisfactory termination. My clerk shall be sent at once to London, and meanwhile the police shall be making inquiries in the neighbourhood, and the Matchborough banks shall be advised of the numbers of the notes. I don’t know what else we can do until we have a little more light from head-quarters.”

So the confidential clerk was sent to London, and wrote back that evening to say that matters were likely to come to a more speedy termination than might have

been expected; for the *Paragon*, after being out at sea for a day or two, had put back to the nearest port, disabled; and he was now going down to meet it, and open his commission to Captain Cayley.

“Providential—nothing less than providential,” Miss Griselda said, when the letter arrived. “I never saw a clearer case of a man’s sin finding him out. I hope the clerk has him in pretty safe keeping. To think, now, that of all the vessels plying between here and America he should fix upon the very one which would have to put back into port! I shall never disbelieve in special interposition again. Shouldn’t you like to see him now, Madolin, when the clerk pops upon him with Mr. Scoles’ letter?”

Madolin could not say that she cared very much about it. If Sir David was satisfied, that was quite enough.

“Oh! but I should. He will be so utterly confounded, and justly so, too.”

“If only the clerk *does* pop upon him,” said Sir David, testily. “I don’t fancy he would let the *Paragon* land him anywhere upon English ground again. He would take a boat and go off somewhere. It is only throwing good money after bad, to take any more trouble about him. A man who could plan everything so neatly as he has done, would not be simple enough to come back until everything had had time to blow over.”

“We shall see,” said Miss Griselda, sententiously. “At any rate, if he has disappeared, it will be proof positive that he is the guilty party.”

But Mac had not disappeared. Next day there came a letter from him, full of regrets. He was deeply concerned to hear of Sir David’s loss. He hoped that the inquiries

which had been set on foot would be successful.

“Just listen to the man,” said Aunt Griselda. “Was there ever such a hypocrite? Yes, Captain Cayley, I hope too they *will* be successful. Go on, if you please, Madolin, with the letter.”

He could not understand how it was possible for the money to have been taken, for he remembered so distinctly having closed the door, and locked the chest himself, the night that he went to London. However, the vessel would be detained a week or two in port, and he would take that opportunity of coming down to the Chase, and giving what evidence he could in the matter. He thought there must have been some mistake. It was just possible he might have taken the money himself, and placed it amongst some of his papers. If so, he could only say he was very sorry for all the

trouble and annoyance ; and he would make a strict search before coming down, to see if any such unlucky mistake had happened.

“There,” said Miss Griselda, triumphantly, “the cloven foot again. Of course he has had the money all the time, and now he wants to pretend that it is just an oversight. Who ever would have suspected such double-dealing in a man like Captain Cayley ? But of course, my dear brother, you will not allow him to slip through in that way. You will have the affair thoroughly sifted. Even if he does bring the money, you will require a strict account of it.”

Sir David, fretting and fuming in his easy-chair, did not seem to know what he would allow or require. Madolin could see the matter more clearly.

“Mac will not bring the money with him, Aunt Griselda—you need not expect anything of the kind. If he took it at all, he

would take it for liabilities which he had incurred in London, and he would pay it away there. Just leave things in the hands of Mr. Scoles, and let us wait patiently."

Next day Mac came down with the clerk, stopping at Matchborough, and going first to the lawyer's office, to learn what he could about the difficulty. That Sir David, or anyone else, suspected him, had never entered his mind. The clerk, according to instructions, had said nothing of the kind. He simply stated what had occurred; and only in the event of fear or resistance on Captain Cayley's part, was he to exercise any authority. Mac's proposal to come down at once had made that needless.

"It is a very disagreeable affair for poor Sir David," he said, leaning his arms on the lawyer's desk, and looking that gentleman in the face with an expression of genuine concern, which must either be the outcome

of innocence or the most hardened guilt.

“Very disagreeable, indeed, sir,” said Mr. Scoles. “And I am afraid before long it will prove disagreeable for some other people too. I think I understood you that you had not been able to find the money amongst any of your own possessions.”

“Not a penny of it—indeed, it was not likely, for I remember so distinctly leaving it in the drawer the last time I had occasion to open the chest.”

“You locked the chest yourself, then?”

“Yes.”

“And also kept the key?”

“Yes.”

“And forgot to give it to Sir David?”

“Yes.”

“And I think you advised him not to open the chest until after a certain day?”

“Yes, I did. You know Sir David’s memory is beginning to fail, and I thought

it was better for him not to meddle with the money until the time came for it to be paid away."

"I think, during the interval, you were down at the Chase again?"

Mac moved himself rather uncomfortably.

"Well, yes. I was down for an hour or two on—let me see——"

"I can tell you, sir—on the morning of the family's return. A rather strange thing that you should not have informed them of your intentions."

"My intentions were my own," said Mac, rather proudly.

"I have no doubt of that, sir. Then came the letter, enclosing the key, which you supposed would be received by Sir David a day or two after the *Paragon* had sailed, and, upon opening the chest, the money was missing. A most singular coincidence."

Mac's face began to fire. He drew himself up very erect.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Scoles, that I am brought here on suspicion of having stolen Sir David's money?"

"I—well, I am not authorised to put the matter in quite so strong a light as that, perhaps. I am simply stating to you the facts of the case, and I am instructed by Sir David to act accordingly."

"Then, Mr. Scoles, I am in your hands," and Mac, folding his arms, took his seat on the nearest chair. "Do with me as you choose."

And Mac said never a word after that—refused to make either statement or explanation.

Very suspicious, thought Mr. Scoles, for a man not even, as one might say, to struggle against his handcuffs. But as he had accepted his position, there was nothing left

but for justice to accept it too. So Mac spent that night and the next in an hotel at Matchborough, under the care of the clerk, until Mr. Scoles had conferred with Sir David as to what ought to be done.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR DAVID was not a hard man ; indeed, when people acknowledged his power, craved his pardon, and were willing to own themselves under obligations to him, he rather rejoiced in the prerogative of mercy. And if the young man was willing now to make a free exposure of his fault, and to solicit forgiveness, he would even yet stay the hand of the law, overlook the offence, and, with a little fatherly advice, let the offender go free, an everlasting bond-slave to the goodness which had spared him public exposure.

Miss Griselda was disposed to view the matter more rigorously. What was the use of having laws, if people could slip through them so easily? In her opinion, Mac stood on a level with Jetsam, and she should like him to meet with the same punishment. Certainly there would have been a sort of serene satisfaction in seeing him on his knees, a repentant culprit before Sir David and the assembled family, and then allowing him to depart under a sharp fire of warnings, cautions, reproofs, and admonitions. But, after all—

And Miss Griselda remembered the hopes she had built up about dear Madolin's comfortable settlement; remembered Hope Meredith, with her artful, beguiling ways, stealing away affection which belonged of right to another, and rejoicing now in the prospect of a position which would keep her from the necessity of earning her own

living; and with such memories, justice refused to be satisfied at a less price than trial and transportation. Aunt Griselda spoke magnificently about a public example.

But Madolin stayed her aunt's wrath. Things had gone now as far, for her own safety, as there was any need for them to go. Expediency, under the guise of forbearance, would do well to step in. Mac would come to make no confession; that was true enough. And a public trial, if it did not end in his conviction, would only leave the matter open for further inquiry; inquiry which had better for herself be stayed. He knew himself suspected. She had fixed a stain upon his fair name which nothing now could take away. She had hurt his honour and wounded his pride. If more could have been done safely, she would have done more; but she had gone as far as her own interest would let her go.

She advised her father to leave the affair entirely; to say that, having sustained the loss and traced it to its source, he was willing now to hush up the matter, and Captain Cayley was at liberty to return to his vessel as soon as it was ready to set sail again. Thus he and Hope Meredith would be separated, for he would be too proud to keep her, even if she wished it, to an engagement under such altered circumstances. And however Mac might try to hide them from her, she would be sure to hear before long. Aunt Griselda could not keep a secret. In a few days it would be told to the Regisons, by them to all their acquaintance, so that, before he reached Canada, Hope's lover would be a marked man, carrying the stain of guilt upon his name, and only saved from its actual punishment by the mercy of the man whom he had robbed.

But, to Sir David's surprise, Mac refused either to make confession or receive forgiveness; or even to leave Matchborough, until the affair had been thoroughly looked into.

Not the behaviour of a guilty man, certainly, thought Mr. Scoles, who was the bearer of Sir David's clemency to the hotel where Mac was still detained under the guardianship of the confidential clerk. To forfeit his passage money, too, and expose himself to the risk of a trial which could have but one ending, when he might have left the country quietly, no one being any wiser for what had taken place. It did look rather like the behaviour of a guilty man, though, that first thing upon his arrival at the hotel, even before he knew what Sir David's decision was going to be, Captain Cayley had written to the English agents of the Canadian company in whose interest he

had come over, sending in his resignation, in consequence of affairs which rendered it impossible for him to transact further business for them. That did look suspicious. That did look as if he expected nothing less than trial and conviction, and had dismissed himself, to avoid the further shame of expulsion.

So, after giving the young man a night to think over his decision, Mr. Scoles again repaired to the Chase, to say that things must now take the regular legal course, Captain Cayley being prepared to defend himself at the next assizes.

But Sir David was too ill to see him. The poor man had given way under the accumulated pressure of anger, indignation, and disappointment. Dr. Clay was in attendance upon him, and as a physician must often needs know what lies beneath the surface of family affairs, in order to understand his

patient's health, Miss Griselda had entered into a lengthy explanation, not omitting anything which could tend to deepen the already dark enough stain on poor Mac's character.

Dr. Clay looked grave. However, he was not there to argue, but to prescribe. Sir David, he said, must be kept perfectly quiet, must have nothing told to him which would arouse unpleasant excitement. Was there no one who could attend to business matters for him? no confidential person in his employment who could superintend the payment of moneys for him, until a regular agent could be appointed?

Then Madolin began to feel her punishment. She had thrust away from her the only props which at this time would have sustained her. She had not calculated upon her father's health giving way. Her one thought had been to save herself and

injure her unconscious enemy. There was no one now to turn to for assistance.

“Ah! then I am afraid we are in a bad case,” said the worthy doctor. “If you could have assured him that things were being well attended to, it would have made all the difference in the world to him. In cases of this kind worry is more fatal than anything else. If we could keep him quiet there might be a chance.”

He said truly. That night Sir David had a stroke of paralysis, depriving him of everything but the mere power of living. No more trouble now for him about money affairs, or any other affairs; nothing for him now but to sleep on to the end.

“We may keep him a little longer with careful nursing and attendance,” said the physician whom Dr. Clay had sent for from Matchborough. “At any rate, make him comfortable, if we cannot do more than

that. He must have one of the best nurses that can be procured."

"He must have Miss Meredith, then."

And Dr. Clay set off at once to Matchborough.

Madolin made no resistance. Her interest in her father's life was stronger than her dislike of Hope. That he should be kept alive, even as a wreck of his former self, was better than the loss of position which his death would involve for her. And besides, Mac's lady-love might as well come and learn from Aunt Griselda, who would tell it sweetly enough, what had befallen the man she had taken such pains to win.

Hope, busy in the hospital wards, made her little arrangements, and came at once. Dr. Clay did not explain to her the reason of Sir David's attack, the worry and excitement through which he had passed. Good-

hearted little Fanny had given him a hint as to how she thought matters stood ; and though the doctor held stoutly to his own opinion as to Miss Meredith's heart being completely in her duties, and nowhere else, still it was better for those duties that she should enter upon them with a mind at rest from anything so unpleasant as the story of Captain Cayley's disgrace must needs be. He only said that uncomfortable affairs had disturbed the old man, and brought on this attack, and that he must be kept as quiet as possible.

Hope took her place by the sick man's bed—took it, not as a friend any more, but only as a stranger and hireling. She could do him little good, but he was lulled by her gentle, tender ways ; her very presence seemed a sort of cordial to him.

Madolin kept apart, rarely coming into the room, and then meeting Hope with

quiet, distant coldness. She had been warned by Dr. Clay not to touch upon unpleasant subjects, since her father's life depended much upon Hope's patience and self-control, and these must not be needlessly disturbed. Miss Griselda, too, received the same directions, but she could not see the force of them. Just a foolish fancy on the doctor's part. He had always had an unaccountable partiality for Miss Meredith, since she had been so meek and obedient to him whilst Madolin was going through that fever. Meek and obedient, indeed! as if she had not had her own ends to serve all the time. As if she did not know that, some time or other, she should want testimonials to get her into a situation; and who so suitable to give them as Sir David Lauderdale's physician?

Besides, Dr. Clay might say what he liked; people in Miss Meredith's position did

not have sensitive feelings. Miss Meredith had sufficiently shown that herself, by her behaviour to Captain Cayley. As if a girl of the most moderate delicacy would have put herself in a man's way so, and taken long walks with him, and continued to meet him whenever there was a chance of doing so. No indeed. And as for her being unfitted for her duties if her mind were disturbed, Miss Griselda thought a little wholesome discipline of that sort would be more likely to settle her down to them. She would not be so taken up with foolish thoughts about the future. If she had the least particle of common sense or gratitude, she would feel it incumbent upon her to put forth every possible effort for the benefit of the sufferer who had been so cruelly injured by the man whom she had lured into her net. Indeed, Miss Griselda thought, upon the whole, she could not do her poor

dear brother a greater service than by hinting to the person who was engaged to attend upon him that she was indirectly responsible for his affliction.

Accordingly, the first time that Hope went out for her daily airing upon the terrace, Miss Griselda trotted after her, and making a few kindly inquiries about the invalid, proceeded to an explanation of the manner in which his attack had been brought about.

“So annoying, Miss Meredith, so very annoying to us all ; and I really fear it will be of the most serious consequence to poor dear Sir David ; because the physicians at Brighton told us on no account to let him be unpleasantly excited about anything. And then for that man, knowing it all, to go and act in such a manner ! You are not aware, perhaps, of the circumstances which have led to the present lamentable state of Sir David’s health.”

Miss Meredith was not ; only supposed that something very painful had produced it. Dr. Clay had told her, some time ago, that a very little thing might disturb the action of the brain.

“ Yes ; and unfortunately this has not been a very little thing—indeed, I think I may say quite the reverse, involving a very serious loss, and from such an unexpected quarter. One might have looked for common honesty at least, to say nothing of gratitude, from a man who had received nothing but favours from the family ; but really, Miss Meredith, I begin to think that these virtues must only be sought amongst the extinct animals.”

Miss Meredith hoped the world was not quite so bad. Had some of the labourers been troublesome again, then ? She remembered that Sir David had had much trouble with his work-people lately, and

there had been talks of strikes and agricultural unions.

“ Oh ! dear no—far from that. We have reason to believe that some one very much more nearly connected with the family has been the cause of our present anxiety. Sir David has missed a thousand pounds from the iron chest in the library, and the facts connected with the robbery leave little doubt that Captain Cayley is the culprit.”

And then Aunt Griselda went into particulars, summing up, with a clearness worthy of a Lord Chief Justice, the evidence against poor Uncle Mac ; his previous difficulties, caused no doubt by gambling debts in London ; his application to Sir David for money ; his concealment of the key ; his abrupt arrangements for departure ; his secret visit to the Chase the morning before the family returned ; his unwillingness to give any information about the vessel in which he

was sailing, together with various little incidents, which her own vivid imagination supplied where a link in the chain was missing.

“So that you see, my dear Miss Meredith, there cannot be the slightest doubt about it. The only wonder is, that our eyes were not opened before. But Sir David, with a generosity which, I am sure, merited a better return, proposed to Mr. Scoles, his solicitor—whose advice, of course, he took at once—to hush up the affair, and allow Captain Cayley to leave the country without any further inquiry. A most friendly act, which my niece agreed to at once. In fact, she proposed it herself, and I did not feel myself justified in resisting, as there is a distant connection between the families. But, to our utter amazement, he refuses anything of the sort—actually insists upon a trial.”

How well Hope, pacing along by Miss

Griselda's side, with beating heart and bloodless face, could understand that of Uncle Mac. As if anything else could satisfy him, after so foul an accusation! And it was false—terribly false, though something which she could not explain away gave a colouring of reality to it. Mac be forgiven for stealing Sir David's money, and then go quietly out of the country, like a whipped schoolboy to his bench! Nay, never! Hope could have laughed; and the colour came back to her face, and a strong, proud trust in the man she loved stirred fondly in her heart.

“I suppose he thought,” continued Miss Griselda, spitefully, “that, as he has managed matters so cleverly thus far, he will be able to get a verdict of not guilty, and then refill his purse by bringing an action against my brother for defamation of character. But Mr. Scoles says the man is mad to

think of such a thing. And he has thrown up his office, too, in that land company which sent him over to England—proof positive, if any more proof were required, of his guilt. He has simply beggared himself.”

Mac a beggar! Mac disgraced! Mac cast out from amongst his friends as a ruined man! Mac with nothing but his honest heart, and his pure right hand to depend upon! She might love him now. She need not fear to look him in the face and tell him all.

And like a queen Hope trod the terrace walk now; and Aunt Griselda, looking up into the girl's face to see white, trembling lips and a rain of tears, saw only a smile most brightly glad in the clear, dark eyes, and a flush upon the rounded cheeks which had neither shame nor fear in it. Very singular; for if ever woman set herself to entrap

unwary man, Hope Meredith had had that intent towards Captain Cayley. Had he jilted her, then, and was she rejoicing at his discomfiture? Perhaps. Well then, the cheerfulness arising from such a cause would qualify her all the better for the discharge of her duties in the sick-room.

And with that consolatory reflection, joined to just a little touch of disappointment that her sword had snapped ere a blow had been struck, Aunt Griselda retired to Colonel Dewar and her strips of knitting.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE MAC at that Matchborough hotel, in custody of a confidential clerk, until further proceedings could be taken against him! Uncle Mac awaiting his trial as a thief—a thief who had stolen into the house of his friend, and taken by fraud what he could not win for asking!

The idea was so ridiculous that again Hope could have lifted up her voice and laughed, as Aunt Griselda trotted away. Only that would have disturbed the sick man, whose window had been opened for him to breathe the summer air as he lay moaning among his pillows.

Hope turned into the avenue instead, and when she was fairly out of sight, ran as fast as she could, clapping her hands for joy, and sending her voice away up amongst the leafy branches in a song of wonder and delight. Then, most quietly and calmly, as became Sir David Lauderdale's nurse, she returned to the house, took her place at the bedside and watched there.

All sweet thoughts came to her in the silence. What she could not do for Mac in his prosperity, she might, with no dimming of her maidenly pride, do now that the dark cloud of adversity had arisen upon him, and the friends who once loved him were turning away. She might go boldly and tell him all that was in her heart; tell him that she would share his poverty, though she could not share his wealth; tell him that her faith in his honour was clear and strong, and that she would go out with him

to help him to begin his life again ; not now to take what he had made for her, but to start afresh in the race, and win or lose together. Mac a thief ! And Hope smiled again. An enemy had done this.

Everything was very still ; no sound but the old man's feeble breathing ; no motion but a quiver now and then upon the unconscious face. She could do nothing for him now. She could but sit there alone and think.

And strange links of reasoning began to shape themselves in her mind ; links which Madolin Lauderdale's words had forged. Madolin, who had once loved her ; Madolin who had once longed to live a noble, gentle life ; Madolin, who spoke no word to her now, who passed her calmly by, a stranger, where once they had clasped hands as friends most dear and precious.

Clearly, though she had not thought of it

for many a day, came back that strange scene outside the little church of St Elma; the light-haired, cold-eyed man, the slender brunette girl by his side, in the black and yellow dress, "so like the one you used to wear, dear Miss Lauderdale," Mrs. Regison had said. And the heavy weight of some unexpressed woe in Madolin's life, shutting her out, as she once said, from all joy and hope and purpose. And those chance remarks about the convict Jetsam and his return, and Madolin's strange change of behaviour. Then her illness and her fevered words; then, long after, the man in the park when Mac and she were coming along, and Madolin's start, and her evident anxiety that nothing should be said. And, later still, some chance remarks which poor Tossie, lying on her hospital bed, weak with suffering from that strained shoulder, had made about some stranger

who had been very polite to her, and had met her often about the fir plantations and had asked so many questions about the Chase people and Miss Lauderdale and Miss Griselda, as if he had known something about them before.

Everything now seemed as if it might be real. Everything seemed crystallising round one central thought. Was Madolin in some mysterious way linked with this man? Had he some power over her? Had he come back, and was he extorting money from her, or receiving bribes to keep her secret? And if so, was this, and not any theft of Captain Cayley's, her means for obtaining it? Strange thoughts, and yet they would not go away; and even as she dwelt upon them, they became clearer and more real.

With a great effort she brought herself back again to the present, smoothed the invalid's pillow, chafed his cold hands,

poured brandy into his lips. Dr. Clay came. Nothing more could be done, he said. Care, constant watching, food administered at regular intervals; he could only prescribe these things. Aunt Griselda trotted in, trying to be very still, but making a terrible rustling with her silk dress; rattled about at the fire, fidgeted at the bedside a little while, entangled her ball of wool round a medicine bottle and threw it down; and then went away, with a vague idea that she had been very useful. The Colonel came in, grave, anxious. He was afraid it was going to be a very serious case. Poor Sir David had a look of death upon his face; seizures of that generally ended fatally, he believed. And then he, too, went out, not feeling, like Miss Griselda, that he had been very useful. And Madolin swept in calmly, silently; took no notice of Hope, gazed for a moment with great,

bright, tearless eyes on the quiet figure under the coverlet; and then as silently swept away again, she also feeling that she had been of very little use.

And so the night wore on, and the grey dawn came up, and Hope watched and waited. And over and over again, through all the perplexing tangle of her thoughts, came that one: Mac a thief, Mac awaiting his trial; and always with it there came a happy smile, because sorrow without sin should give them to each other at last.

Let them do the worst they could, he was hers now, and she dare hold fast to him in the mocking world's face. Let them try him, take from him name, character, position, everything—even send him away, with thief's name branded upon him, out of the country, she would go too, and wait for him, and receive him clean-handed, white-hearted in God's sight and her own, when

the guilefulness and hatred, which she was now only beginning to suspect, had done their work.

Miss Griselda, coming in at daybreak, and expecting to find Hope utterly worn out and wearied, not less with actual watching than with the anxiety which she must naturally have felt, was surprised to see the young face so fair and bright, with scarcely a touch of weariness upon it. What an excellent constitution the girl must have, to be sure! Really, one might think she might be made of bend leather to look like that, after eight hours in a sick-room! and evidently not a particle of concern for the young man with whom she had been flirting so openly, which showed that it *was* flirting, and nothing more. Perhaps she was practising the same thing now with some of the medical students at the hospital, and so could afford to let Captain Cayley go. Well,

so much the better. Her want of feeling, however discreditable, certainly did make her a capital one to sit up all night with a sick man.

Then came Dr. Clay : patient in much the same condition ; must be carefully watched ; brandy at frequent intervals ; support, if he could take it ; a free current of air kept passing through the room ; temperature at a fixed point. That was about all that could be said.

And then the doctor glanced approvingly at Hope, who stood there, bright-faced, clear-eyed, waiting his directions. What a good thing he had had tact enough not to tell her the real state of the case, or she could never have kept up so bravely and quietly. What a splendid lady-superintendent the girl would make, some day or other, at one of the great London hospitals ! And with a few words of hearty praise, Dr. Clay went

away, promising to look in again in the course of an hour or so.

Next came Mr. Scoles. Was Sir David better to-day?—able to attend to business? Because Captain Cayley was holding himself in readiness for affairs to take their course. And if there were any commands to give, or further statements to be taken down, and any additional information——

“No,” replied Madolin, who had to represent her father now; “the case must stand over for a few days, until the doctors are better able to judge of Sir David’s health. Captain Cayley is ready at any time, I suppose, to answer any questions that may arise.”

Mr. Scoles bowed. Yes, Captain Cayley appeared quite ready to do that. Indeed, he seemed rather anxious than otherwise for the affair to be brought to a trial, and did not care at all to concern himself about

its issue. Most remarkable bearing for a guilty man, if indeed he were guilty, which really Mr. Scoles began to doubt. Had a strict investigation been made in the house? Had all the servants been examined? Had all drawers, desks, cabinets, and receptacles for loose papers, been carefully looked over?

"I believe," said Madolin, coldly, "a most strict search has been made. You are in possession of all the facts of the case."

Mr. Scoles bowed again. Sir David might command his services at any time. His confidential clerk was still at the hotel, to ensure Captain Cayley's appearance whenever circumstances might require it. He hoped the ends of justice would be obtained; at any rate the family might rely upon his best endeavours to secure their interests in the discovery and punishment of the offender. And the lawyer went away.

Hope took her four hours of sleep and

exercise, and then came back to the sick-room. It was not likely, the doctor said, that Sir David would continue long in his present state ; but, whilst he did, she must not leave him, except for needful rest. His very life might depend upon medicine administered at the right moment. Heart and brain did their work so feebly now that the least little help withdrawn, or not ready at the right moment, might hasten the end. And a great silence fell upon the house, and people began to step carefully about, and ask each other how "*he*" was getting on. And something fateful seemed very close at hand, the unseen but everywhere felt presence of death. And Catton said she had heard a sound as of a bird's wing swooping down against the oriel window of the west gallery ; and Mrs. Bennet had been kept awake half the night with a clanking of chains in that wall-ed-up room. And Jacob Lund, crossing the

park on his way home from Matchborough hospital, where he had been to see poor Tossie, said that something far whiter and ghostlier than moonshine had passed across the end of the terrace, almost near enough for him to swear that it was the shape of a tall woman.

“And that never comes but what there’s summut worse to come,” he said to Bessie, as he lighted his pipe and prepared for a comfortable evening by the fireside at the lodge.

“Yes,” said Bessie, “I asked the doctor, when I opened the gate for him a bit since, if there was any chance, and he just shook his head, and never no more than that; so now we know what it is. I lay it’ll go hard with Miss Lauderdale, for they were never a family to lay up a deal of money, and it don’t go, doesn’t this place, with the women folk. She’ll have to turn out afore long.”

“Ay, to yond’ little house on the top of the hill, same as old Lady Lauderdale, Sir David’s mother, lived in when his brother came to the place. That’ll most like be it, and a poor bit of a cottage too, after the Chase; and her so proud as she is, and they say there was never a Lauderdale no prouder.”

“Ay, marry; proud enough, I warrant. That’s the sort that goes in at the big end o’ the trumpet and comes out at the little un. It’s her own fault though, she might have been wed this many a year past if she hadn’t lifted herself over-high; but I lay she’s getting that far on now the men won’t be so keen of coming after her. Folks thought Captain Cayley was set that way, but I knew better. And no good neither if he had. It’s been laid on my mind this good bit past that there’s somebody we don’t hear

tell on, and her father comed between 'em, and that's why."

"Then he won't come between 'em much longer. The white lady's a sure sign. And she don't give no long warning neither."

"Well, Jacob, sit you down to your bacon, and tell us how the bairn Tossie's getting on."

At nightfall old Sir David died.

CHAPTER VIII.

“**T**ELL Captain Cayley that Miss Meredith wishes to see him. I have come from the Chase.”

There was no need for Hope to stay any longer at her work now. Early in the morning, without waiting for thanks or payment for anything which she had done, she returned to Matchborough with the housekeeper, who had funeral commissions there; and after calling at the hospital to say that she would be ready for her work in the afternoon, she went to the hotel where Mac was still detained under the guardianship of

the clerk, until Mr. Scoles had further orders about him.

The clerk recognised her. Many people, of whom Hope Meredith had no knowledge, honoured and respected the bright cheery girl who went about doing good amongst the poor people of Matchborough. He knew, too, that she had been sent for to the Chase when Sir David was taken ill, and he imagined now that she had come on some private message. So he took her at once to the room where Mac was sitting at his desk, gathering together papers which might be useful in the coming trial.

“Miss Meredith, sir, from the Chase.”

Mac turned, and a dark flush came over all his face. Hers was the first familiar face he had seen since suspicion set its ugly mark upon him. And with scarcely a look, much less any token of recognition, he drew himself up and said very coldly,

"I suppose, as you have come from the Chase, you have brought some message from Sir David."

"No. I have not," said Hope. "I came because I wanted to see you myself."

"Then will you be good enough to be seated?"

And Mac placed a chair for her; this girl who had once pushed his love away, and now thrust herself upon him in his humiliation. This girl whom once he thought—but never mind; that was all past.

Hope stood there trembling, rather pale. She could almost have turned and fled away, with her story all untold. Mac seemed so hard and changed. His very voice had a tone of strangeness in it; his face, what she had seen of it in one quick momentary glance, had none of the old sweet friendliness left.

"You wished to see me," he said. "Then

you have not heard what has happened within the last few days? I don't think you would care very much to see me, if you knew."

"But I do know. I have heard that Sir David has lost a great deal of money, and he thinks you have taken it, and that is why you are here. And I wanted to come and say that I don't believe anything at all about it. I mean I don't believe you would ever do wrong."

Hope was gaining a little more courage now. Her heart did not beat quite so fast; she could look up into Mac's face, even come a step or two nearer to him, as he stood there by the window.

And Mac softened down, too. After all, she was a good, charitable soul, this Hope Meredith; very pitiful and of tender mercy. Not come with any wise counsels either, or patronising reproofs given out of the super-

fluity of her own goodness; only come to tell him that she did not believe he was a thief. Well, that was something.

“You are very kind,” he said. “You are the first person who has told me that. I should think you are the only person who would have dared to do it, either.”

“I don’t know; but I am quite sure of it myself. And I have come to tell you something else, too. Sir David is dead. He was taken ill two days ago, and Dr. Clay fetched me from the hospital to nurse him, and I watched by him until last night, when he died very quietly. It was there I heard all about it, that the money had been lost and Sir David suspected you, and that made him ill.”

A guilty man might have been glad that his accuser was dead. Instead, a great sadness and despair came over Mac’s face.

“He is gone, and I shall never be able to

clear myself. Hope, no one will believe it but you."

That name, spoken out of his sadness, gave her courage to come a little nearer still. She put her two hands on his and said quietly,

"Never mind; it will all come right. You are an honest man, that is the best thing. And I think now, you are a poor man too. Aunt Griselda told me you had resigned your office in that company, and you could not take it up again."

"No, nor I wouldn't, either. I will never work for others, except with an unstained name. However this may end, I will go and work my own way now, and earn my own crust, far enough away, where no one knows me and no one cares for me. I have had enough of working for other people."

Mac said this bitterly, but he let Hope's

hands rest upon his, and the bitterness was not for her any more. For awhile there was silence, Hope looking away out over the quaint old Matchborough houses to the red gables of the hospital, where she must soon be working as bravely and cheerfully as if she had no troubles of her own to fight against. There was a world of strife in Mac's face. His lips worked restlessly, but he would not speak. By-and-by he made a move as though he would have taken his hands away. Hope kept hers fast upon them.

"Why do you hold them?" he said; "and why do you look in that way? I do not want to be pitied."

"I am not pitying you. There is no need to do that. You are a great deal better off than the people who have been saying untrue things about you. I would sooner pity them."

“Well. You are very kind. I am very much obliged to you for coming to see me. I don’t think I ought to keep you any longer now. We have said good-bye to each other once before. I don’t think this is going to be much better, except that I am glad you believe in me at all.”

“Are you going away soon?”

“How can I tell? I don’t know how all this will end. Perhaps, after all, I may still go away in the *Paragon*; it sails next week. Well then, good-bye. Don’t let me keep you standing here. It is not a pleasant room for a lady.”

Hope turned away. Yet something in her own heart told her that she ought to speak; something in Mac’s voice, a far-off touch of tenderness and regret, striking through the coldness of the words, told her that she might.

“Mac.”

He turned quickly round, a great bright light in his eyes.

"Did you call me that, Hope?"

"Yes."

"Come back, then."

She came, but not very close. Standing just a little apart from him, with tightly clasped hands, and cheeks over which the colour came and went in great sudden flashes, Hope told her story.

"You remember what you once said to me when you were a great deal richer and a great deal grander than I was. You told me, and I would not listen to it then."

"No, and you turned away from me; you had nothing for me. You could not give me your love. Now, you child, you little white angel, you come to me with your pity, but I will not have it, Hope. I wanted more than that, a great deal more than that."

“And you had more,” whispered Hope very softly, “a great deal more than that—you had it all the time. Only Miss Griselda had been saying such cruel things to me, and she told me I was angling for you, and that there was an understanding between you and Miss Lauderdale, and I had no business to receive any kindness from you, and ever so much more. And I felt it was all false, but I could not tell you what was in my heart when they had been saying such cruel things to me. Now I am not afraid any more, and I can tell you everything.”

Mac stood quite still for a little while. Hope’s eyelids dropped; she turned away. There was no shame upon her face, for she had only told out the very deepest truth; but the gladness had died out of it, leaving almost the calm of death. With never another word she was leaving him. She had told him her story now, and this was its

ending, that he had no answer for her.

“Hope, come back.”

Mac held out his arms. She flew to him like a little bird, and laid her head on his breast, and he shut her fast there; and now there needed no answer, for it was all rest and peace and joy.

“Bless you, my darling!”

He bent over her, gave her a long close kiss, in which the whole sweet story of their love was told, and then Hope came quietly away.

Later in the day Mr. Scoles, who had been informed of Sir David's death, came bustling in.

“I think I can see to the end of this difficulty now, my dear sir,” he said briskly.

“There is hope for you.”

“I know there is,” said Mac.

“Ah!” thought Mr. Scoles to himself, “the Lauderdale's have asked Miss Meredith

to call in and tell him, as she went back to the hospital." And in his heart the lawyer was glad, for he had believed all along that Captain Cayley was innocent.

CHAPTER IX.

IN addition to the formal notification of Sir David's death, Mr. Scoles had received a private note from Miss Lauderdale, saying that she wished further proceedings to be stopped. So far as she, representing her father's interests, had any voice in the matter, Captain Cayley was at perfect liberty to carry out his own plans.

"And now, my dear sir," said Mr. Scoles, laying his hand with a sort of fatherly touch on the young man's shoulder, "I think I should advise you to leave things as they are. There is a mystery somewhere, and of

course there is no question about the money having disappeared; but neither Dr. Clay nor my clerk, who are the only people who know anything about the affair, think that you have been concerned in it. I don't believe, if poor Sir David had been in a sound state of health, he would have ever done what he did about it. We must make excuse, you know, for age and infirmities; and I do think the wisest thing for you would be to go back in the *Paragon*, as you originally intended."

"And as a reputed thief."

"Oh! no, my dear sir, nothing of the sort. This note, which I hold in my hand from Miss Lauderdale, quite puts a stop to that. She has evidently got some light upon the subject, though under present circumstances she is not perhaps justified in taking action. However, I consider you are fully exonerated. Nothing further will

ever be said about it now, so far as you are concerned. You will consult your own interests in every way better by returning."

"Very well, then, I will go."

"That is right, and your reputation as a man of honour is untouched. This note from Miss Lauderdale sets that straight."

"Not quite, Mr. Scoles. However, I carry a clear conscience, which is the most important thing."

"Decidedly. And whenever this affair is cleared up, which of course must be sooner or later, for truth is sure to come to the top, I will let you know the particulars."

"I shall depend upon you."

And so the gentlemen parted.

Once more—only once more—that same evening, at Dr. Clay's house, Uncle Mac and Hope Meredith met. The doctor had insisted upon bringing her out, to have at least one good night's rest in country air

before taking up her work again, especially as he had heard from the lady-superintendent that she had had a fit of crying after she had returned to the hospital that morning; a most unusual thing for Miss Meredith, and proving that her brain had been much overwrought by the excitement which she had gone through at the Chase.

Mac, coming to say good-bye to Dr. and Mrs. Clay, found her there, and had just one more walk with her down by the willow-brook—a pleasanter spot for lovers' parting than the little parlour of the Matchborough hospital, which must otherwise have been their trysting-place.

It was settled then that he was to return to Canada in the same ship in which he had originally taken his passage; but return now as a poor man, to work his own way, and make his own living on that little farm out west, instead of tak-

ing things easily, as the well-paid official of a rich public company.

“For I’ll never ask for my place back again; I told you that, Hope, you know. And in six or eight months, if things go well with me, I shall come home again for my little wife. Will that do? Shall you be ready, Hope?”

“Yes,” said Hope, without a touch of fear in her voice; “I am always ready.”

“And you are quite sure you are not afraid—you believe in me, Hope, don’t you?”

In answer to that, Hope only lifted up her face for a kiss—she was not afraid to do that now. And as she put her little hand into Mac’s great strong one, and nestled more closely to his side, they both of them felt that, come what might, there was always peace for them in each other’s trust, and

safety in each other's truth, and deep, pure joy in each other's love.

So perhaps, if Madolin could have seen them just then, she would have found that another of her arrows had missed its mark: Alas for a woman when the disappointments of those whom she once loved become the food of her life !

But Madolin could not see, and Madolin did not know. There were other things to think of now. The luxury of revenge is not always a cheap one, and she was paying a heavy price for as much of it as she had already enjoyed. Between herself and her father there had ever been little sympathy. She had held herself apart, taking no interest in plans or purposes of his. He went his own way, she hers. But his life represented for her position, wealth, consideration,—all of which must go from her now. That little house on the top of the hill,

where the supernumerary Lauderdale's generally ended their days in sober privacy, was a poor asylum for her who had so long trodden the broad lands of the Chase as its queen and mistress. People would not care much for her now. The days of her power were over. No more conquest for her, nor influence, nor supremacy. Only to live on the little her father had been able to save, and to see strangers rejoicing in the possessions which once had been her own.

A dreary prospect ; but still one touch of blackness was taken out of it. The crowning misery of her life was as yet untouched by sympathy or pity. Her secret lay quietly there in her own keeping. She was proud Miss Lauderdale still. If she could only keep it until she died, and take her place with her father's people under the chancel-stones of Nunthorpe Church, she would ask no more.

The new Baronet came to look over the place. He did not wish to occupy it immediately, so Miss Lauderdale was allowed to remain for a year, until she could make arrangements for removing to the little house on the hill.

“And really, my dear,” said Miss Griselda, who was busy writing out a list of things to be ordered in town for her own trousseau—the wedding was to be perfectly private, on account of recent death in the family—“really, my dear, you may be very comfortable there, all things considered. Of course, with a limited income, one must deny oneself many advantages, as I have found from my own experience for the last thirty years; but then, you know, whenever you feel that you would like a little change, I am sure the Colonel and I will be most delighted to see you.”

“Oh, thank you, auntie. I am not dis-

contented, I assure you. I have no doubt I shall be quite able to make myself comfortable. Do not be uneasy about me."

"Not in the least, my dear. The provision made for you in my poor dear brother's will, though not ample, is still sufficient for a single person; only, you know, it is desirable to have friends who can be a stay to one's position, and I should like the people about here to know that there are those belonging to you who can give you a status in society. Colonel Dewar says he shall always look upon you as quite one of his own family. It is really very kind of him, though only what I should have expected under the circumstances."

Every word was a stab to proud Miss Lauderdale. For her to need patronage, protection, some one to give her a position in society! But her punishment was not yet greater than she could bear. She could

hide it all, and no one need pity her for it. Besides, she had her revenge in the humiliation of her rival. It was pleasanter to speak of that than of her own affairs.

“Thank you very much, Auntie Grisel. I am sure Colonel Dewar is very kind. He told me himself he would be a sort of second father to me, and help me in any possible way. So good of him! Has Miss Meredith been paid for her services, or will Dr. Clay arrange that with the people at the hospital?”

“Dr. Clay has looked after it. I don’t think I told you, my dear, of the conversation I had with her the day after she came. I thought it my duty to inform her of the circumstances connected with the loss of the money, and that the matter was in Mr. Scoles’ hands for legal proceedings against Captain Cayley; but it did not seem to make the slightest impression upon her. She went

through her duties as quietly and cheerfully as possible after it ; which showed, you know, that it was only a flirtation on her part. I have not the slightest doubt she has begun already to play the same game with some one else. It is astonishing what lurks sometimes under those straightforward, innocent manners which some girls have."

"Oh, auntie, it was only a case of keeping up appearances. You know how abruptly she left us, the very morning after poor papa's death, without even saying good-bye, or waiting for further instructions, or anything of the sort."

"Yes, my dear, a remarkable piece of rudeness on her part, but nothing more than might have been expected. I have no doubt she was anxious to be back again amongst pleasanter companions."

"No, not quite. Dr. Clay told me that, when she returned to the hospital, her first

performance was to go into her room and have a fit of crying, which lasted nearly an hour. Overwrought brain, he said, you know, and I made no remark ; but of course it was nothing of the sort. Miss Meredith is not the person to have an overwrought brain."

"I should think not, indeed. And I suppose that young man is safely in Canada now, with a rather unpleasant stain upon his reputation, because I told the Regisons about it when they called the other day, and they have friends there, and I gave them a hint that we, for our own part, had no reason to wish the matter hushed up ; so I fancy it will not be very long before he hears about it. I was always rather sorry, Madolin, that you allowed the affair to slip through. It was entirely in your power, you know, to have insisted upon a trial, and I am sure Sir David would

have approved of it. He had a profound conviction of Captain Cayley's guilt; and though neither Dr. Clay nor Mr. Scoles would commit themselves to an opinion, still they could not but be fully persuaded in their own minds."

"It was the best thing to do, auntie," said Madolin, with a sigh of weariness. "A prosecution would have cost me much trouble and expense, which I could ill afford; and the publicity of the thing would have been still more annoying. I thought it better to let it drop."

"And let him go away with the money?"

"If he likes. I have no further interest in the matter."

"Madolin, I must say your opinions are remarkable. You would hear, I suppose, that he had resigned his situation in that company."

An angry flash shot through Madolin's

eyes. That was good again. Character and livelihood both lost ; he and Hope would pay dearly for the defeat she had sustained through them. It had been a hazardous game. A terrible stake had depended upon the casting of the dice, but so far all had ended well ; safety accomplished, hatred satisfied, the risk of discovery, which once seemed possible when Mac talked of bringing the matter to a trial himself, put away, she might be at peace now, such peace as remained for her.

“No, auntie. I had not heard about his resigning his situation, but of course it was the only thing he could do under the circumstances. No gentleman would care to be associated with him in public after what has happened. And now let me go to sleep. I am tired.”

Madolin, leaning back on the couch, shut her eyes. How sallow she looked, Aunt

Griselda thought, and worn, and old, and what deep hollows in her face ! But it was the black dress that made the difference—black never suited the Lauderdale. Madolin would look as different as could be when the time came that she could put in a bit of scarlet amongst her crape.

And Miss Griselda finished writing out that list of things which were to be ordered from town for her approaching wedding.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER a quiet night's rest, Hope Meredith went back to her work at the hospital bright and cheerful, as usual. Her life lay clearly enough before her now; there was no longer unrest or uncertainty upon it. To go on from day to day, doing such good as she could to those about her—this was her work, until the slow months of separation had worn away, and her betrothed returned to claim his own.

But oh! that he could do it without even the stain of suspicion upon his name! For though at first the affair had been supposed

to be known only to Dr. Clay and Mr. Scoles, out of the Lauderdale family, yet Hope soon found that it was matter of common gossip in Matchborough. People who did not know how nearly disgrace of Mac's touched her own life, but only knew that she had had much to do with the Chase people, mentioned the matter to her in a way which showed that they knew very well where the guilt lay. It was such a thing, they said, that a man of apparently respectable character should have taken advantage of the confidence reposed in him, and robbed the people who had given him hospitality. And then they enlarged upon Miss Lauderdale's generosity in not bringing the matter to a trial, as she might have done, and so ruining Captain Cayley's prospects for life. It was the act of a noble lady, worthy of the name she bore. But the Lauderdale's always had been a fine

family. Hope heard such things as these over and over again, for after Miss Griselda had once suffered the affair to ooze out through her dear friends the Regisons, Sir David's loss, its effect in hastening his death, and Miss Lauderdale's noble behaviour, were the talk of the town. She never heard them without a pang akin to bitterness, for she knew they were so false, and yet no word of hers could alter them. The facts were there, the money was taken, and was it likely that weeks would elapse without some light being thrown upon the mystery, if indeed the culprit was not already too well known?

It was no use either going to Miss Lauderdale, and asking to have any further inquiry made. Since that morning when she came away so abruptly, she had heard nothing from them—no word of thanks for anything that she had done, nor even a

message from Dr. Clay, who was constantly coming to the hospital. She was a stranger to them now, and so they wished her to remain. Anything that she could have said would only be scorned by them. Some great wrong had been done, and by a sort of intuition, which she could neither explain nor understand, she was convinced that Madolin Lauderdale knew of it, but until she had clearer evidence she could only hold her peace, waiting patiently. One great wrong in her life had righted itself already, and this would in its own time.

She heard of the Chase people occasionally through Dr. Clay. The new Baronet had come down to look at the house. Alterations were to be made in the management of the estate. Improvements were being planned, a new front talked of. Lady Lauderdale was a person, they said, who liked society, so most probably things would

be carried on a little more brilliantly than in old Sir David's time. But Sir Leicester did not intend to come to the place at present. Miss Lauderdale was to occupy it for several months at least—most likely until after Miss Griselda's marriage, which was fixed for the end of the year; and then she would remove to the little house on the hill. That was all. Dr. Clay only told her facts. He never brought a kind word for her from the people for whom she had done so much. Never any mention was made of the visits which were to have been so frequent, nor any hint dropped that her presence would be welcome. At last she ceased to ask, or Dr. Clay to give, any information. Nunthorpe Chase and its people lay quietly shut away in a past which need only be remembered now as it had given her and Mac to each other.

Poor Tossie still suffered patiently on,

with little prospect of leaving her place in the long hospital ward, where she was so lovingly tended by Hope. The girl was suffering severely for the love of liberty which had made her hide her hurt, in order that her holiday might not be shortened. A day or two might have set her right at first, but now many weary weeks might have to be spent upon that narrow bed before she was able to take to her work again. And Tossie did not like to be unemployed. She chafed and fretted sadly when the doctor told her that her stay in the hospital must be counted by months instead of weeks. Then she turned sullen, and would scarcely speak, even to Hope, who wondered much at this change in the usually bright girl. But a chance word or two revealed the secret. Tossie's wanderings in the park during her holiday had not been all alone. Hope heard her inquiring of her father and mother

if the photographer ever came now to take his pictures ; and after one visit, when her father told her that the man had left that part of the country, she seemed to quiet down and take her suffering more patiently.

Poor little Tossie ! So she, too, had her story, if there had been anyone to listen to it ; and her hopes and fears, which seemed to have come to an end now with the departure of the stranger. And that accident might have caught her away from a future in which she was building up many a pleasant vision, all gone now. Hope had a new tenderness for the girl after that. She would often go and sit by her, talk to her about her home life, let her feel that even away from home and friends there was sympathy for her, until at last the girl told all her little story. How, when she had her holiday a few weeks back, when the Chase people were away at Brighton, she had met some-

body in the park who was almost quite a gentleman, and he had stopped and spoken to her, and then gone home with her to the lodge, and sat talking ever so long to her father and mother.

“A deal better than the common sort, miss, and used to take the most beautiful pictures you ever saw; and that was how he first came to speak to me, for he was settling his things ready, and I was going that way, and he asked me if I would stand still a bit, and so I did—for there didn’t seem no harm in it; and if you’ll believe it, miss, there I was when the picture was done, as plain as could be; and such a pity I hadn’t my Sunday things on, for I’d gone just as I was, about my work for mother. But he said it was the face, and not the clothes, miss, as made the difference; and after that I oft took a walk with him in the park, and mother knew all about it, so as there couldn’t

be no harm ; and he used to come into our cottage sometimes, and he told father he was making his living that way, and heard this was a pretty part of the country. And then, miss, I was laid up like this, and maybe I shall never see him any more at all."

And the poor girl began to cry. Hope comforted her as best she could, telling her that joy and sorrow did not go by chance in that way, but that, if she and her companion were meant for each other, they would meet again somehow, somewhere, and all would be made right.

Hope was going to say more, but just then Jacob Lund came in to see his daughter. He often used to come in by the carrier's cart on the visitors' days, and seldom empty-handed. Sometimes it was a bit of Bessy's short-cake, sometimes a handful of ginger-nuts, or some of Tossie's favourite sugar-

biscuits which her mother had made on purpose for her. But whatever it was, it must be given to one of the nurses first, as the rules of the hospital forbade anything being brought to the patients, or used by them, except under supervision.

This time it was the sugar-biscuits, and Jacob, as he was going out, gave them to Hope. They were wrapped in a half sheet of paper, with a piece torn off at one end. The paper was a form of admission to the Matchborough hospital, not filled up ; and there were some figures upon it, and a memorandum written in Sir David's hand.

Hope laid the paper carefully in her desk. Something might come of it. Mac had told her that the paper which he had wrapped round the roll of bank-notes was a form of admission to the Matchborough hospital, and there were a few figures upon it. If she could find how this came into the

hands of the Lodge people, another link might be added to the chain of evidence which was slowly forming in her mind.

Accordingly, the first day she could be spared from her duties, she asked Dr. Clay to drive her over to Nunthorpe, to see Jacob Lund and his wife. She could do this without exciting any remark, for Dr. Clay often took her out for a drive, and the good people would be glad to hear of their invalid girl.

At the lodge she learned that the paper had been left there by a man who often used to come into the park to take photographs.

“A decent-looking man, miss,” said Bessy Lund, after Hope had answered her inquiries about Tossie, “but not over-well to do, I should say, for all that; and he was going about taking pictures with a box and a stand and things, as I’ve seed ’em myself

many a time at the Matchborough fair. And I was a bit loth to let him in at the lodge gate when first he come, Sir David being particular about having the place close; but he said he'd orders from my lady, Miss Lauderdale, to bring some of his pictures for her to see, so it wasn't for me to turn him back after that."

"Of course not," said Hope, getting another gleam of light on the subject.

"No, miss; though it isn't the rule in a general way, for I remember the time when I've had my scoldings from both Miss Lauderdale and Miss Griselda for letting people in as brought things to sell, because they couldn't abear to meet folks when they was out for their walks, particular the young lady, as I've seen her myself turn sharp round and walk away back, when there's been anybody in the way for meeting her. I recollect once, miss, you was with

her yourself when she told me I wasn't to let nobody in, except them as wanted to see the family."

"Yes, I do remember," said Hope.

And how far back that remembrance took her—to the sweet young spring days when she and Madolin Lauderdale used to walk hand in hand down the snowdrop paths, as they would never walk again. But Bessy chattered on, glad enough to get some one to talk to.

"And Sir David too, poor man! never liked to meet strangers when he was about in his own place; and stands to reason too, for I'm sure now-a-days you never know what they're after. Not as I ever saw anything amiss with this one, though, for he was a civil, decent-spoken person, and set a deal of store by our Tossie, bless her! and took her pictur' over and over, and then he got that he would come in and sit a bit, and

he asked a lot of questions about Sir David, and if the young lady was like to be married, and was there an old Miss Griselda lived with them? Which kind of puzzled me, for you might almost have thought he'd known the family before, and I'd a mind to have told him it was no business of his to be asking such like, only I thought I might as well hold my tongue."

"Ay," said Jacob, who had allowed his wife to absorb the conversation up to this point. "I always says to her, Bessy, says I, don't be over-free with your tongue. There's never a woman yet ever scolded herself for keeping still, though the other way's done a vast of mischief. Least said soonest mended, that's my set-out, and it's served me well."

"Very likely," said Hope. "And has the man been again lately?"

"No, miss. The time he left that bit of paper was the last, as I remember. He told

us he wasn't going to stop in these parts any more; and then he got out the paper to light his cigar, and threw it on the floor, and when he'd gone I picked it up, and seeing it was clean writing-paper, I tore off the burnt part, and popped it into the drawer, and thinks I, it'll come in handy to wrap up something for Tossie; and it did, for I put the biscuits in, the very last time I sent 'em."

"Was it long ago that he came, do you remember?"

"Well, I should say maybe a matter of five weeks or thereabouts. Won't that be about it, Jacob?"

"Ay, thereabouts, as near as I can tell. When I come to think about it, it were the very day Tossie were took to the hospital. If you mind, Bessie, he'd been two days together, and the first of 'em Tossie was out a bit with him in the park, and it was when

she came back she give in, bless her ! with the pain in her shoulder, and we were forced to have the doctor, and I went that night to the Chase for an order for the hospital. I knowed I should get it, because of the Captain being there, as I'd seen him about in the morning. But Miss Lauderdale was at home too, for she sent word out to me as I might have another, if Tossie had to stop in longer. She was always a good missis to our bairn, was Miss Lauderdale."

"Ah," said Hope, "then that was not the time that Captain Cayley came whilst all the family were away."

"I never knew that he did come, miss, when they was all away ; but I know Miss Lauderdale was at the Chase then, because of the message. And you'd been there yourself, too, miss, because my missis seed you with the Captain in the morning."

"I remember," said Hope, remembering

also meeting the stranger, and Miss Lauderdale's start. "And the man was here that day, and the next day; and it was the next day he left the bit of paper at your house."

"Yes, miss, that was it, and told us he was going away out of these parts, and we've never heard no more tell of him; and maybe a good thing too, for I never liked Tossie being took up with him; you see, miss, she's that sort of girl that she likes somebody to keep company with, and don't seem content without a follower; but I've told her many a time it won't come to no good. She's over-young yet. She'd best do like her mother afore her, and get into a good place and be laying up a bit for furniture and that; and then when anybody hands up, she can please herself."

That was enough for the present. Hope chatted on a little longer, and then took her

leave of Jacob and his wife, carrying away with her a fresh supply of biscuits for poor Tossie.

CHAPTER XI.

SHE had now something a little more definite to lay hold upon, something which corresponded strangely enough with the theory she had been forming in her own mind. She was quite sure now that the stranger they had met in the park had some connection with Madolin Lauderdale. Mac had identified him as the photographer on the Brighton beach. And the Regisons, who had also seen him in the park, were quite sure that he was Gustave Nilken of Heidelberg, the returned convict Jetsam, of

whom she had heard them speak during their first visit to the Chase.

As she was coming down the village to join Dr. Clay at his house, and be driven back to the hospital, she met Mrs. Bennet, the Chase housekeeper, looking quite the lady in her handsome new mourning. Everybody said how liberally the Chase servants had been put into black upon poor old Sir David's death.

Mrs. Bennet stopped.

"You'll excuse me, Miss Meredith, but I thought I should like to know how Tossie is getting on. She's having a long spell of it, but Miss Lauderdale says her place is ready whenever she can come back to it."

"I am afraid Miss Lauderdale will have to wait, then. It will be months before she is able to do even the lightest work. Dr. Clay says she must rest until quite the end of the year."

“Dear me, miss, you don’t say it! And to think that it’s all her own fault, as one may say, for going about when she knew she ought to have laid up with her shoulder. But I know what it was, Miss Meredith. It was that man she got acquainted with when she was having her holiday whilst the family was at Brighton. Catton told me a deal. You see Tossie’s one of that sort that’s always after somebody, and if she had a bit of liberty given her, she was sure to pick up with a follower; as I used to say to her mother over and over again, she ought to keep the girl in stricter; but what’s the use of talking?”

“I have heard about the man,” said Hope: “Tossie told me herself, and her father and mother have been speaking to me just now. If he was not a suitable companion, though, there is no danger for her now. Jacob

says he left the place a month or five weeks ago."

"Yes, ma'am. I think it was Miss Lauderdale gave him leave to come in first, with his pictures, and I mentioned to her that I thought Tossie made herself over-free with him, and she said there should be an end to that; and she fired up a little, for you know Miss Lauderdale never allows anything of that sort amongst the maids here, and very proper too, for one never knows where it may end. And after that she went two separate times to speak to him, as I'm quite certain about it, for I saw her go myself."

"Was that just before he went away?" said Hope.

"Yes, miss. I met her in the park one morning quite early, a great deal before her usual time for walking; for you know, since her illness she's never been an early riser,

and I fancied something had worried her, for she wasn't at all herself; and a bit after I turned, and she was talking to the man, and very earnestly, too, and then she turned a little away from him, and then back again, quite close up to him; and I fancy she gave him something, and he went away, and since then he's never been seen about the place. I always said Miss Lauderdale was a good mistress, and never let anything go on amongst the maids that wasn't right, if she could stop it. However, she needn't have been afraid about Tossie then, for it was the very night before that her father had been for the hospital order. The poor girl had been forced to give in, after all, about her shoulder. Good morning, miss, and maybe you'll tell her we shall all be very glad to see her back when the time comes."

Hope walked on; thinking, thinking.

Here was another link in the chain of evidence. Not for Tossie's safety, surely, but her own, had Madolin Lauderdale talked so earnestly with the man that morning; and early too, "long before her usual time for being about." Talked with the man, given him something; and a little while afterwards he had gone into the lodge, lighted his pipe with the very piece of paper which Mac had wrapped round that roll of bank-notes, and told Jacob that he was going away out of these parts.

The more Hope thought, the more clearly everything seemed to arrange itself; but wisely she kept the matter in her own heart. The truth which was unfolding before her was so unutterably terrible and sad that it could be acknowledged as yet only to herself. It would have thrilled her with the deepest pity had it not revealed such heartless cruelty.

She determined to be bold and brave, and go direct to Miss Lauderdale about it ; not, however, taking the slip of paper, for that she meant to keep in her own possession. If Madolin refused to admit anything, then she would take counsel of Mr. Scoles. There seemed evidence enough, at any rate, to clear Mac from his supposed share in the guilt. It was certain now that that short visit of his to the Chase, upon which so much suspicion had been built, had no connection with the loss of the money, since some days before, this man Jetsam had had in his possession the paper which was wrapped round the roll of bank-notes, and had produced it, too, just after his last meeting with Miss Lauderdale.

Once more Hope asked Dr. Clay to drive her over to Nunthorpe. The good man must have thought the air of that part of the country specially refreshing to her, since

she so frequently sought it. She made no appointment with Miss Lauderdale, for she knew that, rather than have an interview on this subject, Madolin would go away, plead illness, engagements, anything; and so she went without notice or warning.

It was a bright, beautiful September day. The moor was just one purple glory of heather; the air was sweet with blossoming gorse, which had burst out like a blaze of sunshine here and there amongst patches of blue gentian. It was a day for joy and gladness and thanksgiving; not a day to touch upon so dark a secret as that which Hope came to unfold. But she had her work to do, and she must do it.

She did not need to go to the house at all. As she was coming up the avenue, having called in at the lodge to give Jacob and his wife news of their daughter, she caught sight of Madolin in one of the little

side-paths, and hurried on to overtake her.

Hearing footsteps, Miss Lauderdale turned. The listless indifference of her bearing changed to dignified questioning as Hope came up, apparently bent on speaking to her. She would have bowed and passed on, but Hope stopped.

"I came to see you, Miss Lauderdale. Can I have a little conversation with you now?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it. Miss Archer appears to give you a great many holidays. I heard of your being at the lodge only a few days ago."

"Yes, I met Mrs. Bennet as I was coming out. I had not much time to speak to her, for I was full of thought about something I had found out, and that is what I have come to speak to you about to-day."

"Found out." Two unpleasant words

for Miss Lauderdale, of Nunthorpe Chase, and never more so than when spoken by honest, straightforward little Hope Meredith. Hope, with the clear brain and pure heart that had God's vision, the vision of light and right and justice given to it. Hope so wise to know the truth, so brave to speak it. And yet how could even Hope know anything?

"If I can be of service to you, pray tell me. I am quite ready to help you. Shall you go to the house, or shall we stay here? My aunt is in town for the day."

"We will stay here," said Hope. "I do not want to go into your house any more, and it is for yourself alone to hear what I have to say. I was thinking, first of all, that I would go to Mr. Scoles, but then it seemed better that I should tell it only to you first."

Mr. Scoles; and Madolin's brows tightened.

Then it was something about that affair of the money. But she only said, very haughtily,

“As you mention Mr. Scoles, I presume you have heard something in connection with Sir David’s late loss. However, there is no need to go any further into that. I have told my solicitor that I wish it to be dropped entirely. It is not my intention to take any more advice in the matter.”

“No, but it is mine, for Mac’s sake.”

For Mac’s sake! and Madolin looked down into the young, earnest face beside her. Had it come to this, then, that they should speak of each other so?

“You seem to have become very familiar with Captain Cayley, Miss Meredith, that you use his name in this way.”

“Yes, I have,” said Hope, fearlessly. “I loved Mac a long time ago, and he loved me, and he asked me to be his wife; but I could not say yes then, for I was only a

poor little girl, and he was rich and honourable, and Miss Griselda had been saying cruel things to me about him, and you were not kind to me yourself, and tried to make me think that he did not care for me. But now that you have put a great stain upon his name, and people think evil things of him, and he has been obliged to give up his appointment, I am not afraid any more. And I told him that I believed in him, and loved him."

"You told him so! What a most maidenly thing!"

"Yes, most maidenly that I should not let him go away, thinking that the only girl he loved mistrusted him too, and called him thief. You had taken away my happiness, and you had tried to take away his character; but it ended differently, for I am very happy now, and Mac knows I trust him against all the world."

Little Hope was beginning to blaze up now. Madolin had better have a care. There might be passion of the rightest, noblest kind in the heart of this ordinary girl, too. Blood of English nobles and Spanish grantees might not course more hotly when injustice stirred it than did that of a hospital nurse, flouted with her "unmaidenliness."

"Ah, well, Hope," and Miss Lauderdale changed her tone, "I beg your pardon. I was not aware you were so easily offended. Captain Cayley is a very good sort of man, and I have no doubt you will be very happy, and I shall be very glad to speak to Sir Leicester next time he comes down to the Chase, and ask him if another appointment cannot be found. I believe he has good interest with government."

"Captain Cayley doesn't want any interest with government," said Hope, impetuously. "He would not take an appointment if Sir

Leicester would give it to him a thousand times over. It is justice now, not patronage, that he wants, and I have come to see if I can get it for him."

"Then I think you had better go to Mr. Scoles, if it is a matter of justice. I do not happen to have studied law."

"Miss Lauderdale, shall I go to Mr. Scoles and tell him all that I know?"

"Do, if you wish it."

Madolin's tone was lofty, but inwardly she trembled. The game upon which she had entered was becoming too difficult for her management. She must not make an enemy of Hope, if she could avoid it; still less must she seem to fear her. So she added, with a sort of kindly indifference—

"But perhaps it would be better for you to tell me first. I should be interested in knowing any particulars, and I may be able to help you."

“You can help me, Miss Lauderdale, if you will ; if not, I can help myself. A week or two ago, Tossie’s father came to see her, and gave me some biscuits for her. They were wrapped in a half-sheet of paper, which was a form of admission to the Matchborough hospital, and in one corner were a few figures, and a memorandum in Sir David’s writing.”

Madolin struck her foot up against a mossy stump, and nearly fell ; a flood of colour rushed over her face, then died out into pallor.

“I have startled myself. Go on, please.”

“I took care of it, because Captain Cayley had told me that the missing roll of notes was wrapped in a half-sheet of paper like this.”

“Quite possible ; and this might be a trick to avert suspicion from himself.”

“Wait. You know that is not true. As

soon as I could, I went to the lodge, to know how this piece of paper had come into Jacob's possession. He told me that a man who had come to the park to take pictures dropped it in their house. Captain Cayley and I met that man in the park once, just before we came upon you, and you turned back to speak to him. Captain Cayley recognised him as a photographer whom you had seen on the beach at Brighton, the night before you came home so suddenly. Mrs. Regison knew him again as Gustave Nilken, of Heidelberg, the convict Jetsam. Mrs. Bennet had seen you with him—had seen you put something into his hand, just a few minutes before he went to the lodge, and left that piece of paper."

Madolin walked steadily on, looking straight before her, speaking no word.

"I thought it all over within myself," continued Hope. "I remembered what

you had said, and what no one but myself had heard, when you were ill, and it seems to me there is but one way. I have never told anyone what you said then—I never will—but you must tell me the truth now, for you know. I believe that money was given to Jetsam to bribe him to hold his peace; and you have allowed the suspicion of stealing it to fall upon Captain Cayley. You can tell me, if you like, and I will be as true to you as I have ever been; but if you will not tell me, I will show the paper to Mr. Scoles. Mac shall not carry the name of thief whilst I can help it away from him.”

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a long, dead silence in the September woods. It seemed as if the birds had ceased their singing and the leaves their murmur, to hear what Madolin Lauderdale would say in this, the supreme moment of her life.

She had paused, a little apart from Hope, under one of the great elm-trees. The sunlight poured through it in golden rain upon her uplifted head and proud, stern face. Never yet, for evil deed of theirs, had face of Lauderdale been down-dropped. Nor was there any red flush of shame upon her

cheek. Sharply, coldly she spoke, every word like the keen flash of a sword-stroke ; only it was upon her own heart they smote with such bitter wounding.

“You have been very clever—you have found it out—I took the money to give to Jetsam.”

“Then what shall I do ?”

“Do what you will,” said Madolin ; and if Hope’s eyes had not been towards the ground, they would have seen Miss Lauderdale’s fixed where, scarce a hundred yards away, a little pond glimmered in the sunshine. Rest there, at least, from shame, if shame must surely come. “Do what you will.”

“I do not know what my will is.”

“I do, then. Tell the world that I, Madolin Lauderdale, am a thief ; that ten years ago I married a man who was a forger ; that on the morning of our marriage

he went away, and was soon after convicted and transported ; and now he has come back, and I took the money to bribe him away, and I made my father believe that Captain Cayley had taken it. Tell the world this, and then go back to your hospital, and nurse your sick women, and make them say how kind and good you are ; and then go and marry your lover, whom you have saved—no convict or forger, but a brave, honest man, and be as happy as you may.”

Hope looked up now. She saw an ashy face and dark eyes shining in their passionless agony, and she heard the quick breath coming and going through lips that were drawn back from the clenched teeth ; and pity strove with justice, and there was a great tumult in her heart. Could Mac's honour only be secured at such a fearful price ?

"Miss Lauderdale," she said, and laid her hands on Madolin's. They were cold as clay.

Madolin took hers away.

"Please do not touch my hands. I do not love you."

"I know you do not. I have known that a long time. But if you hate me, I need not do you wrong; and it would be wrong, even for Mac's sake, to break my word to you. I will never tell what I know of your life. But if I show Mr. Scoles the paper, Jetsam will be traced, and then all must be known."

"Let all be known, then. What difference can it make?"

And again that quick glance towards the little pond.

"No, all shall not be known. I only want you to do this—to write to Mr. Scoles, and Dr. Clay, and Mrs. Regison, who know

of this loss, and tell them that you have found Captain Cayley to be perfectly innocent, and that you know now who has taken the money. And write to Captain Cayley, too. This is all I want you to do, but I will not be content without it. And when this is done, no one shall ever know what I have known."

"I will do as you like," said Miss Lauderdale, mechanically. "Shall we go to the house at once? And then you can see me write the notes."

"Yes."

And they went, speaking never a word, over the sunshiny green turf, across the terrace, gay with summer flowers, sweet with scent of mignonette and heliotrope, and the spaniels came fawning upon them for caresses, and the peacocks trailed their gorgeous plumage past. But still with never a word they went on, and away to the oak

dining-room, that grand old room where the portraits of the Lauderdale people looked down so graciously from their gilded frames. And there Madolin bade her guest be seated, and she took out her crested paper and wrote ; then handed the notes, one by one, before she closed them, to Hope.

“That is done,” she said at last, with a deep breath. “You will like to post them yourself, Miss Meredith, and then you will know that they are safe.”

“No, I shall not. They must go with your other letters. You must not think that I cannot trust you. And now I suppose I may go.”

“Yes. You have done your work. There is no further need for you to stay. I hope you are perfectly satisfied.”

Madolin rose and drew herself up to her full height. One might have thought that she, and not quiet little Hope Mere-

dith, had done the noble deed that day.

"Then I wish you good morning, Miss Meredith."

And she bowed with most stately grace. But Hope could not leave her so. She would not take the cold hands again which had once been drawn from her proffered caress, but she looked into the colder face, and said with pleading tears in her voice,

"Miss Lauderdale, we once loved each other very much."

No softening of the rigid lines of lip and brow, no kindling of light in the fixed, staring eyes.

"Yes, I suppose we did. We know better now. I do not wish to be loved again."

"May I know that you will remember me sometimes kindly?"

"I shall remember no one. I only wish to forget. Have you anything more to ask

of me? If not, I again wish you good morning."

"Have you no message for anyone? It is the last time."

"Tell Tossie we do not forget her. Catton will be glad to have her back when she can come."

And Madolin walked slowly away to the farther end of the room.

Hope came out. It was over now. All had been done that could be done. They must part so. Yet it was very strange to her. She thought Madolin would have been broken down with shame and gratitude, and there was no sign of either. She had never yet met, she could not understand, a nature so proud in its very hopelessness of misery.

But neither could she understand the self-righteous exaltation which some women, having done what she had done, would

have felt. Almost she forgot the kindness of her deed in the terrible pain which it had wrought for another, and that other the friend whose love, though only a memory, was an undying memory still. Again and again that pale face, with its look of speechless woe, came back upon her. She could not bear it—she must make one last despairing effort before the final separation. She felt that after this fateful interview they could never meet again. Madolin would not, if she could help it, stand face to face any more with one who had forced her to the unutterable humiliation of confession. But still one word, one look, one touch, to say that their friendship had closed more in sorrow than in anger; and then Hope could be content.

She turned back. Madolin was standing in the little curtained recess at the end of the room, her hands tightly clasped behind

her head, her face pressed against the casement, her whole frame shaking with suppressed excitement. Hope came nearly up to her without being observed.

“Miss Lauderdale, I could not go away.”

Madolin turned, stiffened at once into cold self-possession.

“I fancied I was alone,” she said, with great haughtiness—“I am not accustomed to be intruded upon. I think I said good morning to you some minutes ago.”

“Yes, you did; but after to-day I shall never see you again, and I wanted our last words to be kind words.”

“I understand. You have laid me under great obligations—you wish me to express my sense of them a little more clearly. Miss Meredith, I thank you, then. You have been exceedingly considerate and lady-like. Are you satisfied now? It was

never the way of the Lauderdale people to show much gratitude."

"Nor was it ever their way, I think, to look coldly upon those who looked kindly upon them. Miss Lauderdale, I do not belong to your set. Miss Griselda has told me that often enough; but always I have been true to you, and always I have been your friend; and now it is all over, and I want you to shake hands with me before I go away."

Shake hands with this girl whom she hated, and who might as justly have hated her, but who, instead of hating her, stood firm, rock-like, steady between her and inconceivable disgrace—her only shelter from it!

Madolin's lips quivered. The blue veins swelled upon her temples, there was a mingled light of pride and relenting in her eyes. One moment more and she would

have flung herself upon Hope's breast, and in soft, warm tears the bitter past would have been washed away. But her mother's spirit within her pressed back that little touch of tenderness. Weep before the woman who had power over her? Weep over her chains, her misery, her defeat? Ask pardon like a child for the lie which ten years of horrible suspense had forced her to act? Nay, it were better to die and end it so.

She put out her hand.

"I suppose I forgot it before. Good-bye, and thank you very much. Perhaps Tossie would like these flowers—will you take them for her?"

And she took a cluster of geraniums from a little silver stand.

"The girl was always fond of anything pretty. And say we do not forget her. Good-bye again."

The words were good, but they came like snow-flakes from a sky which no sunshine ever warms. Hope came away again.

Madolin watched her across the terrace, down the mossy old steps, past the fountain, and until she was out of sight amongst the elm trees. Then she flung up her arms and cried passionately,

“Hope ! Hope ! come back ! Oh ! come back, my only friend who ever loved me !”

But Hope was far away.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE returned to the hospital rather sad, but still with a great weight lifted from her mind. Mac was a noble man and an honourable once more, before all the world.

That he had lost his appointment; that he was faring forth to battle single-handed with the world—no help therein but his own strong hand and heart—this was so little; nay, indeed, did it not seem the best of all, because it did but give them the more entirely to each other? He would not stoop so very low now to take her from that daily work of hers and set her by his side. Sweeter

far to toil with him, and rest, when toil was ended, in what they had both striven to win, than sit, a white-handed lady, in ease and luxury which were none of her own earning. Hope was quite content.

Next day Mr. Scoles came to the hospital, requesting to see Miss Meredith on special business. He was exceedingly happy to tell her that he had received a note from Miss Lauderdale of Nunthorpe Chase, in which she communicated to him the gratifying intelligence that the missing notes had been traced, and that Captain Cayley was now fully exonerated from any share in the transaction. She also wished that any injurious reports respecting him, which might have been circulated, should at once be corrected—so far as Mr. Scoles had the power of correcting them.

“So very gratifying, Miss Meredith,” said the lawyer, “though I do not know that I

should have intruded upon you with the information, not being aware that you possessed any special interest in the facts of the case; but this morning I received a second note from Miss Lauderdale, expressing a wish that I should call upon you and acquaint you with the contents of her previous communication. A most satisfactory ending to a very painful business, and I only wish poor Sir David had lived to see matters cleared up. His last days must have been much embittered by such a suspicion resting on a friend of the family. And now I suppose it will be my pleasant duty to inform the officials, to whom Captain Cayley sent in his resignation, that that resignation is withdrawn."

Hope thought Mr. Scoles need not trouble himself to that extent; but she held her peace. She was not supposed to be specially interested in Captain Cayley's affairs. So the

lawyer departed, very glad, to do him justice, that the affair had ended so. For though the prosecution of the trial would have put an odd hundred or two into his pocket, yet he loved an honest man's good name better than his own gain.

That second little note moved Hope much. It was one of those occasional rays of light from Madolin's shut-up nature which had such a strange fascination for those who felt them. It revealed even a faint touch of humility, a sort of acknowledgment that she did not deserve Hope's confidence, so readily given ; and Mr. Scoles had been commissioned to bring the note as a tacit assurance that she had been true to her trust. Hope, innocent, crystal-hearted Hope, could have gone and fallen at the feet of this miserable woman, and loved her still, and yearned to be taken back to her friendship. There was loveliness even in the ruins of a character which

had once possessed such elements of nobleness. Sweet thoughts, tender thoughts, thoughts of infinite pity and longing stirred Hope almost to tears, as she remembered the blackness of darkness out of which Madolin Lauderdale must have roused herself to send that little note, to show that even yet she was not quite unworthy of trust.

“And tell Tossie we do not forget her.” And the little gift of flowers. How like tender blossoms on the lava of a volcano did they seem, now that Hope knew all; more beautiful for the very despair of the poor heart which had offered them.

“She was always very good to me, miss, was my lady,” said Tossie, when Hope brought the flowers to her bedside. “For as proud as she is, and father and mother says there isn’t a prouder anywhere. But she never showed it to me, and it was all along of you, Miss Meredith, that I was

taken in there, and the making of me, as mother says it will be. Only I hope Miss Lauderdale will have me back again, now that poor Sir David's gone, and her obliged to leave the place."

"I don't know, Tossie; we must wait."

"Yes, miss, but I was thinking perhaps you wouldn't mind speaking a word for me. She always thought such a deal of what you said, did Miss Lauderdale, and I'm sure I would go for a very little wage, to keep in the family".

"All right, Tossie. If I can do anything for you, I will; but you must not trouble your little head with any thoughts of that sort now. What you have to do is to get well as fast as ever you can, and then go home for a while, and take care of yourself, and sit out in the garden until you are strong again. After that, it will be time enough to think of your work."

“Yes, miss,” said Tossie very meekly, and nestled her pretty face, pretty even in its paleness and suffering, more closely into her coarse pillow.

“And I mean to be different when I get home, in a good many ways. Mother shan’t have to scold me so much. I seem to be ever so much older now, and I shan’t care a bit to be out o’ nights, and all that sort. When I’ve seen you going about, miss, among the people here, I’ve thought sometimes, if Miss Lauderdale can’t have me back I should like to be under you, among the nurses. I shouldn’t mind the cap, miss, now, a bit, for all it looked so queer like at first, and I’m sure I’d do my best that ever I could.”

“I believe you would,” said Hope kindly, “and I think you would make a neat, quick little nurse. We will think about it. Perhaps that will be the best thing for you to do.”

And Hope laid her hand caressingly on the girl's forehead. Ah! how much of pain and loss had that illness spared to little Tossie! Better far to lie moaning there for a while than moan through life in that other anguish for which no healing could ever come. Better to lose the freshness and fairness she was once so proud of, and keep her heart untouched by the spoiler's hand, than wake up, too late, to find that life must be travelled henceforth with a cloud upon it which no tears could wash away.

"A mad world, my masters," was all Hope could say to herself, as, when her day's work was done, she went out in the quiet after-light, and paced up and down the hospital garden, thinking of poor Madolin in her misery, and little Tossie with her wounded heart scarce feeling back to rest again; and Mac starting life afresh, with the shadow and stain of guilt upon him; and

Jetsam, who had done all the wrong, hugging his bribe in safety, no scourge yet for him, and no anguish of humiliation and despair.

A mad world indeed. Into what deeps of wrong she had gazed, concealed under lives that might have been so fruitful of good! And side by side with her prayer for Mac, as he toiled at his clearing in the far West, she said one for Madolin Lauderdale, upon whose darkness now no day would ever dawn.

CHAPTER XIV.

"IT is over now," Madolin whispered, when her passion had spent itself. "Hope has gone."

After a while she rang the bell.

"Let those letters be taken to the post at once," she said, "and the note for Dr. Clay delivered by hand. Go with them now."

She paced up and down the room, wrote a second note, ordered that to be posted too, then stretched herself at full length upon the couch, and lay quite still—still as any shrouded corpse, but for the breath

which came and went so quickly through her tightened white lips.

Indeed it was over, and Hope had quite gone. But there must be no sign of suffering or despair. Things must go on just as usual. She must rouse herself when the sound of carriage wheels was heard upon the terrace, and snatch up a bit of delicate fancy work, and be ready to receive those delightful Regisons, with no other cloud upon her face than sorrow for the very recent death of a kind old father might be supposed to have brought there.

“ We knew you were at home alone, dear Miss Lauderdale. We were at the station, seeing some friends away, and met Miss Griselda going up to town for the day ; so I said to Gertrude we would drive over at once, and sit an hour with you, because I am sure you must be so dreadfully lonely. You know I cannot endure being left by myself.

If Gertrude goes out, even for an evening, I always get a friend to come in and sit with me. I cannot imagine, dear Miss Lauderdale, how you exist through days and days of it."

"Oh! it is very little trouble to me," said Madolin, with a careless smile. "I have always enough to do. I have been writing to you this morning, to tell you that we have traced those notes Aunt Griselda told you about. Captain Cayley has had nothing whatever to do with it."

"Dear, dear! You don't say so! How very curious! What a fortunate thing you did not go on with the trial!—though I am sure at the time it seemed very generous of you, so much more than might have been expected under the circumstances; for you know there did not seem the least doubt about it. So the real culprit has been discovered?"

"The real culprit *has* been discovered," said Madolin, giving each word out slowly and distinctly; "but I shall let the matter drop. It is right, however, that Captain Cayley should be completely exonerated."

"Of course, my dear Miss Lauderdale; and it was very kind of you to have written to me at once. Because, as Miss Griselda did not mention the circumstances to me with any injunction of secrecy, I have repeated them to several of my friends. I believe nearly everyone in Matchborough knows about it now, and I never hear it spoken of without praise for your generosity. I am sure no one else would have been so considerate. But, do you know, a curious thought flashed into my mind about it the other day?"

"Indeed!" and Madolin picked up a few rosy leaves which had fallen when she gave those geraniums to Hope Meredith.

“Yes. I wondered whether that man whom we met in the park had anything to do with it. You know I have told you before that I am quite sure we recognised him as Gustave Nilken of Heidelberg, and we knew he had come back to England, and had been seen on the beach at Brighton, and Captain Cayley had recognised him here as the same man you had seen at Brighton, so that there could be no doubt about it. And it certainly seemed very strange that just at the time he was seen prowling about here, the money should have disappeared. Only, you see, one never thinks of things at the right time.”

“No. And everything seemed to point in another direction.”

“Exactly. In quite another direction. Poor Miss Griselda! She will be so glad. She made a dreadful trouble about it at the time. It reminded her so of that affair at

Heidelberg. And so everything is cleared up now?"

"Everything. And I intend to let the matter drop."

Mrs. Regison would have liked to know a little more, but Miss Lauderdale's manner left no room for inquiry. When she let things drop so decisively, they must be left there. She was convinced that that man in the park had had something to do with it. However, if she could not talk about him in connection with the money, she might in connection with other things.

"We have just been in to see Mrs. Clay," she began again, "and she was talking about that poor little maid of yours, Tossie. I suppose she will not be out of the hospital for some weeks to come? Very sad, is it not? And to think that she might have avoided it all by a little timely care."

Madolin brightened a little. Of course

it was very sad that Tossie should have to stay in the hospital so long, but it was a great relief that anything should arise to turn Mrs. Regison's thoughts from Heidelberg, and Jetsam, and Captain Cayley.

"Yes, poor child! I cannot think what made her strive to keep up in that way. She is not one who hides her feelings generally. She is very impatient of pain or inconvenience."

"Ah! but there was a reason for it this time. Mrs. Clay told me all about it. Do you know she had quite got up a flirtation with that man who used to come so much into the park with his photographic things, and was with him constantly, and he used to flatter her about her prettiness, and offer to take her portrait. Indeed, I believe he did take it two or three times; and I daresay the poor child thought he meant something serious by it all. And then—

which makes me more and more certain he was Jetsam—Bessie Lund told Mrs. Clay that he used to talk to her about Sir David, and Miss Griselda, and yourself, and ask if you were married. Such horrible impertinence! The man ought to have been ashamed of himself. But of course that only made him seem grander to poor Tossie. I daresay she thought he was a hero in disguise, whilst all the time he was only amusing himself with her. Do you think Miss Meredith knows anything about it? You know she will come under Miss Meredith's care at the hospital."

"I really cannot say," replied Madolin, coldly as ever. "Miss Meredith was here this morning, and I sent Tossie a few flowers, but I never enter into confidential matters with her."

"Of course not. If you will pardon the remark, Miss Lauderdale, I always did

think you were a little deceived in that girl's character."

"Yes," put in Gertrude. "If you could have seen the way she flirted with poor Captain Cayley at that party at the Milbanks'. But in your presence I have no doubt she was a different person altogether. Excuse me, mamma, pray go on."

And Miss Regison resumed her teasing of the pet spaniel, who was delighted at having so much attention paid to him.

"I only mentioned her name," continued Mrs. Regison, "because I thought if you gave her a hint about it she might speak to the lady superintendent, and Tossie could be kept in the hospital a little longer, until this man has lost sight of her. You know it would be a thousand pities if she got entangled in that sort of way, and I daresay the man has not told her anything about himself. He is not bad-looking, and speaks

like a tolerably educated person, and Tossie is very likely quite proud of her conquest."

"There is no danger," said Madolin, choking back the passionate wrath which was whitening her face. If Jetsam had been amusing himself, then, with vain, pretty little Tossie! "The man will not come here again. I only allowed him to take a few views of the park, and I understand he has left this part of the country now."

"Then that is all right. I must tell Mrs. Clay—it will be a great relief to her. She really seemed quite concerned about the girl this morning. You know, everyone likes Tossie, she is so simple and good-natured—as empty as a drum, I should say, but very charming, for all that. I am sure, to see her standing under the sycamore-tree by her father's door, with that coquettish little hat, and a bit of blue ribbon tucked in amongst her hair, one might

have thought the days of Arcadia had come back again."

"Except that, in Arcadia, I believe, the shepherdesses did not fall in love with itinerant photographers," said Madolin, with a sharp laugh; "the arts were not sufficiently advanced. The collodion process must have been quite in its infancy then; and I fancy blue ribbons, even at twopence halfpenny a yard, were still reserved for the upper classes. But I agree with you that Tossie is very pretty, and very empty; and she is very much safer at the hospital, with her broken shoulder, or whatever it is, than standing under a sycamore-tree, with the sunlight glinting down upon her, and a straw hat on. Miss Regison, I am sure you must be tired of talking to Floss. He appreciates it, but he cannot make an adequate return. Will you not come to the window, where you can see the peacocks? They only ask

to be looked at, not talked to; and, you know, that is so much less trouble."

Miss Regison, happily blind to sarcasm, and delighted to be patronized by Miss Lauderdale—though, of course, that beautiful home at the Chase would have to be given up now—came to the window, and admired accordingly. And luncheon was brought in, and the Swiss garden was talked about, and Colin was despatched for a leaf or two of the new fern, and the last magazine story was talked over, and Tossie was allowed to lie quietly on her little bed in the Matchborough hospital; and at last Mrs. Regison, greatly to Madolin's relief, thought it was time to go home.

"I believe, Gertrude, my dear, there is a storm rising, and I am so dreadfully afraid of thunder. I could almost fancy I saw a flash of lightning just now."

Madolin, afraid that they would want to

stay until it was over, suggested that Bowles should put the horses into the close carriage, and drive them home.

“Oh, no, thank you,—not for the world. I daresay it was only my fancy; and I should like to go round by Rossbury and tell Miss Milbank. You know, she was so dreadfully concerned about poor Captain Cayley, though I told her there could not be the least doubt of his guilt. And I shall write out to Canada by to-night’s mail, and tell them exactly how things are. In my last letter to dear Percy, I told him that Captain Cayley was returning under very suspicious circumstances.”

“Then, by all means, you had better remove that impression. Good morning. I will tell Auntie Grisel how good you have been, in coming to see me.”

Yet, as Miss Lauderdale shook hands with her guests, she felt a bitter satisfaction

in knowing that, after all, Mrs. Regison would not be able to state "exactly" how things were.

CHAPTER XV.

ONCE more she was left to the undisturbed luxury of her own thoughts. With a great sigh of relief she lay down again. There was a dead stillness everywhere now. The air was hot and sultry. The leaves scarcely stirred. The flowers seemed listening for a storm. Let it come. Oh! for a great tempest to sweep down from the black clouds; for wind and lightning and thunder to smite this dreary silence into motion! All without so still! Only within her own heart the raging of passionate despair.

So Jetsam had, after all, been amusing himself with rosy-cheeked little Tossie—speaking soft words to her, making her believe that she was cared for. Yes, truly it would have been a pity for the poor girl to have thrown herself away upon such a man, even if some one else, who might perhaps have looked a little higher, had not already done the same thing. And Madolin could have laughed a great, bitter, sardonic laugh.

Was this his truth, and this his honour? And if so, would he hold very fast by any promise he had given her? Small chance now that the money which she had obtained at such a terrible cost would buy his silence when once he needed more. She was in his power still. It would all have to be lived over again—the suspense and the terror and the agony and the shame. There was no respite. And yet she could not

defy him. She could only cringe to him with larger and larger bribes. And even that threat of punishment for his forgery upon her father was useless now. She had no authority, she could bring no witness. He was safe, safe to tyrannise over her to the utmost of his will.

The slow hours rolled on as Madolin lay there, groaning in her pain. Catton knocked. It was time for my lady to be dressed for dinner. So she roused herself, stepped proudly to her room, and the crape robes were taken out, and the jet ornaments, and the handkerchief so heavily embroidered with black, and the mourning brooch set round with pearls—surely the sweetest thing that was ever seen, and adding, if possible, a whiter grace to the fair round throat upon which it fastened the velvet band.

“Only when you *can* wear a bit of scarlet, ma’am, it will be such a relief to you.

It would do my very heart good to put just a bit of geranium in amongst all that crape ; not but what it's handsome as handsome can be, and beautifully made ; but you wouldn't look the same, ma'am, if you would have a flower with it, or your coral ornaments. I shouldn't say the coral ornaments would be too much, ma'am, to-day, if you would let me put them on. Only Miss Griselda might have something to say about it. Miss Griselda likes everything to its time."

"Yes, Catton ; no ornaments to-day. I must be very plain. I feel as if I should like to go into a nunnery."

"Oh, ma'am, to hear you talk ! As if nunneries were made for the like of you ! Now if it had been Miss Griselda, I shouldn't have wondered, for she's come to that time of life when they're very proper ; though I can't say but what a wedding is always more to my taste, and I hope she'll be very happy

with the Colonel. Young people should have their turn first, though. Perhaps, ma'am, you've heard that Tossie isn't likely to be out of the hospital before Christmas. I believe she thought her turn was to come when she was gallivanting about so with that photographer. I told her mother no good would come of it; but I don't hear that he ever comes about the place now."

"My vinaigrette, Catton."

"Yes, ma'am, it's the day takes effect upon you; very sultry for anybody that isn't strong. We shall have a storm before night, and then you'll feel better. I've seen you look pale this day or two past. And a good thing it didn't come until the peaches were gathered. The housekeeper says she hasn't had such a preserving of them since Sir David came to the place, twenty years ago. And as for plums, ma'am, it would do you good to go into the kitchen garden and see

them hanging ; but Jakes will have to see to the gathering of them before night, if he wants a bit of bloom left upon them. And you really won't have the ornaments, ma'am, nor even a bit of geranium ?”

“No, thank you, Catton. Nothing but crape to-night.”

And Madolin swept downstairs again, but only to meet Aunt Griselda alighting from the carriage, a nucleus in the centre of innumerable small parcels ; all of which, after dinner, had to be opened and examined, and the caps tried on, and the bows fitted, and the gloves stretched ; and Madolin must listen whilst the details of the shopping were gone through, and fashion dilated upon, and the exact length, pattern, colour, and style of the bride-elect's dresses minutely explained.

“Because, you know, my dear, at my time of life one has to consider richness of

effect in costume. With young people it is different. Now in that floating crape of yours I should be simply ridiculous ; but in a substantial watered silk, with abundance of jet ornaments——”

“Yes, auntie, I can see it as plainly as possible ; and the point-lace caps with the mauve bows, which have reminded me of Nemesis ever since that day at Brighton, when you sat in judgment on poor Uncle Mac. But I am sure you must be tired and want a sleep after your wearisome day in town ; so, if you will excuse me, I will go away down the avenue. The air in the house positively stifles me.”

Calmly enough she stepped out upon the terrace, and down the mossy steps to the green sward path under the elm-trees ; but when she was once out of sight of the house, she began to pace rapidly up and down, gasping in the sultry shade, her dry lips

apart, her bright tearless eyes staring upwards to the rustling leaves.

No help ; no hope of rest or peace as the long, slow years went on, but only that terrible sword hanging for ever over her, ready to drop. And turn where she would, there was only blackness and despair, blackness and despair. Exiled from trust, orphaned of affection, shut out from love, the poorest woman's birthright, her proud spirit crushed to the dust by the discovery of her sin, and ground more pitilessly down by the thought that the discoverer was the girl whose happiness she had sought to spoil, the girl whose silence stood between her and public disgrace.

"Oh, my God ! I cannot bear it !" she cried, flinging herself down under the tree, where that morning Hope and she had stood together. "I cannot bear it ! Let me die !"

And the good God heard her prayer. Whilst Aunt Griselda slept and dreamed of happiness to come, dreamed of her point-lace caps, her watered silk dresses, her married state and importance, Madolin lay face upwards to the sky, and there came a great storm from the west. First a hush as of panting stillness and fear; then a low muttering of thunder from the distant moorlands, and a mysterious rustling as of human speech amongst the elm-tree leaves; and then the black lips of the clouds shot out their lightning, and heavy rain-drops fell one by one upon the white cold face.

Madolin never stirred. Let them come thicker and faster, and wash away her stain; or let the lightnings burn it out, as, fiery-eyed, they played around her. And then the winds arose, and great thunder-claps smote from the hills, and the rain poured down upon her as she lay there,

white, motionless, her cold hands were clasped upon her eyes. Sweeter far this storm and tumult than the quiet which mocked her so. And if there were angels of death abroad, who so sweet as they?

And still Aunt Griselda slept, and still the storm raved louder and louder, and little children awoke crying, and hid their heads, and Tossie stirred from a feverish dream, and flung out her hands, saying she had seen the white lady in the terrace walk, and wept so that Hope could scarcely comfort her. For had not her father said that never came but there was worse to come?

And the poor little birds with fluttered feathers cowered under the branches, and cattle huddled together in their hovels, and the sheep fled to the hedges, and still the lightnings flashed hither and thither, death here, death there, for the living creatures whom they touched; the winds might roar,

the thunder smite, the little brook dash wildly over its banks, *they* did their work quietly, with just a single look.

Jacob and Bessie trembled in their cottage. Was ever such a storm known before?

"God defend them that's abroad in it!" said Jacob, as a lightning flash shivered the bark from the sycamore-tree by the door, and a clap of thunder made the cottage shake.

"Amen," whispered Bessie; "but it's the thunder frightens *me*. I hope Tossie'll win through it safe."

"Ay. It's done with at Matchborough, afore this. It's going off by the westward. There's blue sky away over the moorland. Now we've nobbut to wait and see what's done."

For the grey-eyed twilight had stolen forth, and there was a great calm; and the

winds ceased, and the red lightnings stayed, and the thunder spoke its last word, and the rain-drops fell wearily, drop by drop, upon the glistening leaves, and stars came out, the clearer for the storm, and all was silent and at rest.

Even so was Madolin, who lay under the old elm-tree, quietly as though she slept; with only a little dark stain across her lips, and no look of pain or fear upon her face. Nothing there now but the calm of death, which comes when pain and fear are gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE was found there by a gamekeeper when the storm had passed. He went for Jacob Lund and they carried her home to the Chase, where much lamentation was made over her, and many tears shed, and many notes of condolence read by Aunt Griselda from friends who knew not how much sadder the tragedy of Madolin Lauderdale's life had been than any by which death could end it. And when for a week the Chase shutters had been closed over that long black coffin in the state bed-room, a funeral train swept through the lodge

gates, Jacob and his wife standing to watch it go past.

“So now you know, you do,” said Bessie, turning back into the house, “and you’ll never laugh at me no more, when I tell you there’s a winding-sheet in the candle; as if I didn’t see it as plain as anything, only a week ago this very day, when she was took for her death.”

“I didn’t laugh, Bessie, it was a sup of tea which went the wrong way. I’m not the man to set myself up against anything of that sort, and Tossie telling me, last time I went to see her, that she woke out of a dream while the storm was agate, and saw the white lady on the terrace, as clear as if she’d been walking on it herself.”

“She did, did she?”

“Ay, she did, and said it to Miss Meredith as was set at the bed-head; and Miss Meredith quieted her down, and sung ’em a

little tune to comfort 'em, for they was all pretty well scared with the storm ; but none of 'em got a sign, except our Tossie."

"Nor wasn't like to, seeing they didn't belong to the place. I should like Miss Griselda told. I shouldn't wonder if she took to the girl a bit more after that ; maybe have her to live maid with herself, for I'd like her to stop in the family."

"She don't want to stop in the family, then. She's got a notion of being nurse there, where she is, under Miss Meredith, and says she wouldn't wish for nothing no better, nor I don't think we could, neither."

"Well, to be sure ! You see, it don't look like service, that's it. Maybe we might as well give in. She'll be well took care on, if Miss Meredith has the say over her. And the wage good, too, I should think."

"She didn't say nothing about the wage. It was the white cap frightened her a bit at

first, for she was always so fond of doing up her hair; but she said she'd brought her mind to it, and I didn't make any objections."

"More to blame you if you had, and such a chance as she won't likely get again, now that the Chase is to be left, and Mrs. Catton never a good friend to her at the best of times. It was all Miss Meredith got her in there from the first. Was that the new gentleman, Jacob, with Miss Griselda and the Colonel?"

"Yes; Sir Leicester Lauderdale. And they say he'll do things with a flourish. Going to be married, too, so we shall have a bride to welcome afore long."

"That's right. I'd always rather have to do with a wedding than a funeral. I thought we might have had a bit of something by-and-by, when Miss Griselda and the Colonel got wed; but I lay that won't be at the

Chase now. And small enough, too, wherever it is ; and I don't know but what it's as well away. I shouldn't have liked that old lady cutting her bride's cake, and the young miss dancing in her stocking feet at the wedding. I hope she's better off now ; but bless us, who knows ?”

“That's not me nor you,” said Jacob. “I don't think she'd much of a carrying on here, any way.”

“No, that hadn't she ; and for as oft as I've tried to measure it, I never came to no ending about it. If it was Sir David as kep' something from her, she might have brightened up after he was took, but it wasn't that, I don't believe, so maybe it's best. And not a mark upon her, they say, and just lay as if she was asleep, with her hands clasped that way, and as quiet as a child. It was a cruel thing. I never heard tell of a crueller. And now I lay there'll

be a sale, and the place fettled up, and we shall start afresh. I don't wish to say nothing against them that's gone, but I'd as soon things was a bit brisker, as we're to have a change. One might have thought there was a curse upon the place this ten year past, with never a laugh nor a smile on anybody's face, while Captain Cayley and yon Miss Meredith came—bless 'em!—to bring in a bit of sunshine."

"And that didn't last long, neither," said Jacob.

"No more it did; but there was a screw loose there. I always thought that man as come about the park had something to do with it, and if I'd had *my* will, the police should have been on his track pretty quick, instead of everything hushed up, as poor Miss Lauderdale would have it. However, there'll be a clearing up some day. Folks hadn't need to talk. Can you hear the

music, Jacob? Have they got agate?"

"Yes. Hold still a bit."

And Jacob, taking off his cap, stood bareheaded in the sunshine, whilst the church-bells tolled out, and a peal of organ-music announced that the burial-service had begun.

So Madolin Lauderdale was laid in her own place under the chancel stones, and the grand old name carved above her head, none knowing that the maiden wife of Jetsam, the convict, rested there from bitter sorrow. And the strong soul which had suffered so much, and seen the light, and yearned so passionately for it, yet followed the darkness, went to its own place too.

As soon as possible after the funeral, Miss Griselda went away to London, and there was a sale at the Chase. Shoals of people from Matchborough, who had seen the Lauderdale splendour afar off, came to look

at the place, and handle the china, and finger the dainty linen, and give themselves, for once in their lives, the pleasure of what might almost be called coming into intimate relationship with a county family, nothing being taken away before the sale, except a few pieces of furniture which the new Baronet had purchased. To tread on Lauderdale carpets, and look at themselves in Lauderdale mirrors, and unfold Lauderdale table-cloths, and breathe the very air in which Lauderdale aristocracy had once lived and moved and had its being, was a privilege cheaply purchased by a seven-and-sixpennycatalogue.

“I should say there was never such a thing heard of,” remarked Mrs. Bates, a furniture-dealer, to Mrs. Byson, the undertaker’s wife. “She was found by a gamekeeper under one of the trees in the park, and no mark upon her to say how she came

by her death. Run there for shelter when the storm came on, most likely; for she had all her beautiful crape on, and nothing to protect her—just as she was always dressed of an evening. It's a most shocking thing, and a warning to us all."

"Yes, but not so bad as if she could have stayed in the place," said Mrs. Bysom, who, notwithstanding her husband's profession, was of a cheerfully practical turn of mind. "You know, it would have been a coming down for her. She was always a very proud person, by what one heard, and she would have had a deal to put up with in going to that little house over the hill, which was all Sir David left her. Maybe she's taken away from the evil to come."

"Well, Mrs. Bysom, perhaps you're right. I cannot say I ever looked at it in that light before. And better, too, than if it had happened a few months later, and put

the old lady's wedding further off; for, of course, Sir David must be properly respected, and one waiting will do for both."

"Yes, only there would have been fresh mourning if it had happened later. A funeral's nothing for profit when the family's in black already. If afflictions must come, I say let them come at a convenient distance, when there wants a fresh supply, and not when you may say the bloom is scarcely off the crape. I don't suppose there would be as much as a pair of gloves or a yard of silk to buy when Miss Lauderdale was buried; and a bad thing for the servants too, for there would be nothing new given them."

"Well, you see, folks can't have a wind-fall but once, and they were put into beautiful mourning when the old man died. I'm sure, you might have taken Mrs. Bennet for a lady born, to have met her in Matchbo-

rough the first market-day after the funeral—the best French merino, I should say four and sixpence a yard wouldn't have bought it, and everything trimmed with crape, and the neatest of flowers upon her bonnet; and the lady's-maid, by all accounts, the same, for Miss Lauderdale liked everything done handsomely."

"Oh! yes, I don't go against that," said Mrs. Bysom; "only I say if things had been different, they might have been better off. The old lady was to have been married before Christmas; well, then, there would have been something new for them all, for a wedding's a wedding, let the bride be as old as she may; and then, if this affliction had come a bit later, there would have been the mourning all over again, same as at first, and money into everybody's pockets. But we can't make things different."

And Mrs. Bysom sighed. The sigh might

be for Miss Lauderdale's untimely death, affecting as it did the interests of the servants and dressmakers; or it might be for the sultriness of the autumn day, or it might be for the throngs of people coming to the sale, which would naturally make things go up in price, and she wanted that set of crockery out of the housekeeper's room.

"I daresay it'll fetch more than it's worth," she said, "being a fine day and a deal of company here; but I shan't go past what my husband told me. And he said I was to bid well up for a few of the kitchen things."

"Did he? Well, then, I won't go against you, or else I had my eye on them. You can always depend, you see, on things brought out of a house like this—they're not like things stuck together at a ready-made shop, just to last through the first

using. And a bit or two of old china I shouldn't mind. You can sell old china for almost any price now; and I'm a person that knows it when I see it. Shall we go and look? It's all put together in one of the best lodging-rooms. And if we don't buy, it's no matter. We've paid our money, and we may as well see what there is."

So the sale got over, and then hordes of workmen were sent down to the Chase, for, now that it was empty, the new Baronet intended to have it refitted as speedily as possible. People did say, if everything could be finished in time, he would bring his bride to keep Christmas there; and if so, it was to be kept as never before a Christmas had been kept at Nunthorpe Chase, with bonfires and torchlight processions, and dinners and dances for the tenantry, and merry-making for old and young, rich and poor, for many a day.

So that perhaps Bessie Lund might have her wish after all, and see things "a bit brisker" than in the old times when Sir David Lauderdale and Madolin, his only child, used to go so drearily to and from the village church, where now they both lay amongst the rest of their people, their work done, and their story, whatever it might be, ended.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOPE MEREDITH kept her Christmas after a quieter fashion, with Dr. and Mrs. Clay. And when the snug little dinner was over, and the good doctor had been left to his afternoon nap in the easy-chair, another very important matter was settled between the two ladies, as they sat with their feet on the fender in the drawing-room.

For Mrs. Clay said she had arranged it all in her own mind that, when Captain Cayley came over from Canada in the spring, Hope and he should be married at Nun-

thorpe church from the doctor's house.

"No, no, my dear, don't you begin with anything about thanks," she said, as the tears began to brim over in Hope's eyes—"nothing in the world will please John and myself half so much. I've had it in my mind ever since you told me you were engaged. You know he was just a little bit crestfallen when I broke it to him that evening after you had been here and given me leave, because he had always said you were so completely given up to your work, had your whole heart in it, and all that sort of thing; as if a woman ever could have her *whole* heart in anything but loving and being loved. But men don't know. How should they? I let them talk because it pleases them to think they understand about everything, but I know as well as can be it won't turn out anything of the sort. And so when John said you would

never marry, I just held my tongue. I knew you would."

"Well, but I never should have married anyone but Mac."

"Oh! nonsense; somebody else just as good would have turned up, and you would have been ever so happy; but still it is very nice that everything *has* come right. It was plain enough to me what he meant that morning, nearly six months ago, when he met you here. Don't you remember?"

Didn't Hope remember? What a happy light of love in her eyes, as she looked away over the snowy fields to the willow brook, grey in the frost now, where she and Mrs. Clay had been gathering flag-flowers that August morning, when Mac and the dogs came up.

"I was quite sure from that time—at least, I was quite sure what he wanted, although you did not seem as if you would

help him on a bit. Perhaps you felt more than you chose to say. I was just the same with John before we were engaged. I used to pretend I didn't care, and I wouldn't seem a bit pleased to see him, though all the time my heart was as full as ever it could hold; and I daresay you were just the same."

Hope's rosy cheeks seemed to admit the possibility, though she did not say anything.

"I fancied you had a little feeling for him, and it was only because you were such a proud little puss that you wouldn't let yourself show it. And do you know, my dear, when there was all that disagreeableness about the money, I said to myself, though I never breathed a word to any other creature—not even to John himself—now this will bring matters round between them, and I just waited. And you were

here that night, you know, when he came to say good-bye to John, and for all he was going away with that ugly mark upon his name, he looked so bright and happy ; and you, too, had a smile upon your face that I'd never seen there before ; and I was quite sure something must have happened, though of course it was not my place to make any remark before you mentioned it to me. I can't bear people taking things for granted. Nothing used to vex me so much when first John and I were engaged. Was it really pride kept you back, Hope ?”

“Perhaps it was—pride and Miss Griselda too.”

“Ah ! that stupid old Miss Griselda ! What disagreeable things she used to say about you ! I'm sure she never deserved to be married herself. But people say that he has turned out a regular tyrant—doles out the money to her in half-crowns and

two-shilling pieces, and requires an account of everything, even to pins and black-lead ; so I should think the Lauderdale pride will have a bit of a fall in that direction—and serve it right too. I can't bear people who think themselves above all the rest of the world. And then, you know, I was so glad when Mac—you'll let me call him Mac, won't you, because he seems quite to belong to us now?"

"Yes, call him Mac," said Hope, with a smile and a blush again—"never anything else but Mac."

"Well, then, I was so glad he didn't take his appointment back, even when the people offered it to him again. I think it looked so grand of him. I do like a man to be independent. I would make John do just the same thing myself, even if we had to live on bread and cheese for it. I can't bear being suspected, though it was

ridiculous ever to have suspected Mac. One need only look in his face to be sure that he would never do a mean trick. But there were wheels within wheels in that affair. Don't you think there were, Hope?"

"Yes."

And Hope said no more.

"I always fancied that man who came to take pictures in the park had something to do with it, the money disappearing when he was about the place so much; and it seemed a very curious thing to me that no inquiry was made in that direction, especially when he had been recognized as the person who had robbed the bank. But then, of course, poor Sir David dying made all the difference, and Miss Lauderdale's terrible death stopped everything, and now I suppose nothing ever will be known."

"Most likely not," said Hope, absently.

"I really should like to know very much,

though, what Miss Lauderdale had found out when she wrote those notes to different people, to say that Captain Cayley was cleared from suspicion. Of course she must have heard something. And after that I quite expected somebody would be arrested, and there would be a trial, and all the rest of it. Only she died. It was very kind of her to write the notes as soon as ever she found that Mac was not to blame. But I always did say that Miss Lauderdale was quite the lady. She might be proud and haughty, and she might hold herself aloof from people more than there was any need to do, and she might think a great deal of her own position, but still she was quite the lady."

Hope, gazing into the fire, made no reply.

"Ah! my dear," and Mrs. Clay stooped down and gave her a good motherly kiss,

“I know where your thoughts are. I believe you have scarcely heard a word I have said for the last quarter of an hour. You have gone all the way to Canada, and you are sitting by Mac’s side, and you are going over everything again from the very beginning. Well, I understand all about it. It was just the same with me before I married John. I used to sit and dream, and build castles in the air, and if anybody talked to me I wished they would be quiet, that was all.”

“But I don’t wish you to be quiet,” said Hope, coming back as from a deep reverie. “I only don’t want you to talk about poor Miss Lauderdale. It is all so dreary and unsatisfactory.”

“Well, so it is; and I was nothing but a stupid to begin about it on Christmas-day, of all days again. Only, you see, it happened to come up, and I never can help saying

just what I think about anything that comes up. But even if you did want to be quiet I could quite understand it. You are very much like me, you know. I had no father and mother, and no one to take much care of me, and it seemed to me as if there was nobody in the world but John, before we were married. But one can't keep on thinking like that."

"Perhaps one had better not begin to think like it," said Hope, demurely, but with such a happy smile hiding itself in every dimple, and at the corners of her lips, and under the round, half-dropped eyelids. "I think there are a great many people in the world besides Mac. Only he is the best of them all."

"You little stuck-up woman!" and Mrs. Clay kissed her again. "As if there was not my John too, and he as good as ever Mac can be. But I think there never was

but one good man in the world, and every happy wife has married him, so we needn't say anything more about it. But, Hope, I *am* so glad for you, and now I've got something else to say. Don't keep looking into the fire, look at me instead. Do you know what a great deal prettier you are than you were six months ago?"

"Is that the something else you had to say? Because, if so, I don't think it was worth turning round to listen to."

"Then turn back again, and I won't say the rest. Hope, I shall tell Mac how saucy you are."

"He has found out already. He is not marrying me under false pretences."

"I don't believe he *has* found out. You dare not look at him in that way, and toss your head."

"Indeed!"

"No. And so I mean to warn him,

before the banns are published. Nobody has any idea what you are. You look as innocent and simple, and yet all the time——”

“Yes ; and yet all the time, that is just what Miss Griselda used to say. Oh ! I am so glad about the half-crowns and two-shilling pieces. And to hear Miss Griselda accounting for black-lead and pennyworths of pins.”

“If you look so defiant as that, you will maybe have to account for them some day yourself. I have heard that in the back-woods of Canada——”

“And so have I. They count the cinders and keep the coals in a sugar basin. Mac has told me all about it. Now what was it that you were going to say ? Because if it is worth hearing I will turn round again.”

“It isn’t nonsense. I was going to say something about your wedding-day, Hope.”

And there was just so much motherly loving-kindness in Mrs. Clay's voice, that all the sauciness died out of Hope's, and turning to the doctor's bonnie little wife, and seeing the warm smile upon her face, the two nestled more closely together, and that long talk began by the Christmas firelight.

How strangely like the days when Hope and Miss Lauderdale had sat together by the fireside in the Nunthorpe Chase dining-room. Miss Lauderdale dead three months ago, and well-nigh forgotten now by all save the woman whom she had thought to wrong so cruelly. Ah! Hope might be noble now. That she loved so truly and kept silence so faithfully, could no longer vex the poor proud Lauderdale dust that had ceased to chafe against any of these things.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“IT was about the wedding-day, Hope, you know; that was what we began about, only such a lot of other things came up. I was thinking about it last night, and I said to John I should like it to be just as if you were our own child. Oh! dear me, what a trouble I used to make of it once, that I hadn't a daughter of my very own to arrange a wedding for; but John only laughed at me, and we are just as happy now as if there were ever so many. I was settling it all in my own mind before I went to sleep, and how you should come

and stay here for a couple of months beforehand, to get everything ready ; only when I came to the wedding dress, I stuck quite fast. It was no use thinking of white silk, because you will never be able to wear it out there ; and yet it must be white of some sort. I am sure Mac would not like you to wear anything but white. I would have spoken to John about it, but men don't know anything."

"Oh ! yes, they do, at least Mac knows, and he says he should like me to be married in white muslin."

"White muslin ! Then what can the bridesmaids have ? You must be all alike. Oh ! and I stuck fast at the bridesmaids, too, I could not think of any. And yet fancy a wedding without bridesmaids !"

"You will have to fancy it, then ; for I don't mean to have any. I should like just to walk quietly across the meadow

some pleasant morning, with you and Dr. Clay, and no one else."

"Not even Mac?"

Hope laughed.

"Of course. I forgot him. Everybody forgets the bridegroom at a wedding. Yes, Mac too. And people shall not know that we are going to be married at all."

Mrs. Clay looked rather blank.

"Oh! dear, I had settled it as differently as could be. Why, then, what was the use of making such a fuss over asking you to be married from our house, if it's to be nothing but a cup of coffee and white muslin and good-bye? I feel like an impostor."

"And so should I, if I gave you all the other trouble. And I want to be able all my life to remember my wedding-day as something quietly happy, with only the people that I love about me. And no speeches, and no drinking healths, and no

pretending that you feel what you don't feel."

"You are a funny girl, Hope. Why, when I was married we had no end of fuss, and I'm sure I like to remember it very much. Of course I wore white silk, with a veil—everybody does that; and the loveliest gold necklet, that John had given me the day before; and I had six bridesmaids—three in white muslin with pale green, and three with pink, and everybody said it was very pretty. I was meaning to have yours just the same, only, as I told you, the white silk troubled me, and I couldn't think of plenty of girls for bridesmaids. But you will come and stay with me, will you not, even if I may not do as I like about the wedding?"

"Yes, as long as you like. You will have to teach me how to keep house, and how to sit properly at the head of a table.

Just fancy, I don't know a bit about it."

"Oh! it will all come to you. I had never sat at the head of a table when I was married, and at first I was always saying the wrong things to the wrong people, and making such a stupid of myself; but John did not seem to mind it at all. If you only dress yourself prettily and look nice, that is everything. And you know, then, I did look very nice. How well I remember having my first dinner-party in that room where John is asleep now. There were to be six people besides ourselves. I was quite sure I shouldn't do it properly, so we went through it all beforehand—we put the chairs round the table, and I fancied the people sitting in them, and I talked and did everything just as if it had been real. Of course when they did come I forgot everything that I ought to have said; but still we managed, and the gentlemen told my hus-

band they had never enjoyed an evening so much. I don't believe people care about your being so very self-possessed, if only you are good-tempered and nice."

"Yes; and then out in the far West there are so few ladies, which makes all the difference. I shall feel as if I was a very great somebody there."

"You might have felt that here, if you had only known what Dr. Clay and all the other physicians said about you; and if you had not always wanted to screw yourself up into a nutshell. But if you can only fancy yourself a somebody, you will be all right. It would not do for some people, but it will do very well for you. And then you know, Hope, if you are coming to stay with me, it must be soon. Mac said spring, did he not?"

"Yes, next spring."

"And when I was a girl, we always said

that snowdrops brought the spring, and they used to come up regularly in our garden at home on the fifth of February, the day of St. Agatha—I mean the flowers came out then; and we called it spring. The fifth of February, and this is the twenty-fifth of December. Why, Hope, it is just upon us. You must come to me directly. I don't see what is the use of your going back to the hospital at all."

"Oh! but I do. The snowdrops may come when they like, but spring does not come until the twenty-first of March, the proper astronomical time for it, as we used to learn in our lessons on the globes. The vernal equinox, you know."

"No, I don't know. I never learned anything about vernal equinoxes when I was at school, and I don't believe Mac will let them interfere with his notion of when spring commences. I know the equinoctial

gales blow at the end of September, and I'm sure you don't call that spring, and you wouldn't like to wait so long, either."

"You dear little woman!"—and Hope kissed the plump, pretty matron face which looked so determinate and triumphant—"that's another equinox altogether, and it has nothing to do with my preparations. There are two equinoxes in a year, you know."

"I tell you I don't know. I never learned that sort of thing at school; at least, we had lessons on the globes, but it was only latitude and longitude. But I do know this, that you may look for Mac any time after the fifth of February, and so you must come to me at once, and we will have a whole day's shopping in Matchborough, and I will help you to get everything ready, and you must let me choose the embroidery for you, and the bonnets, and all the pretty

things. Oh! how I do like having anything to do with a wedding! And to be able to crow over John, too; for he said he was quite sure you were so devoted to your work. As if a man could ever tell. I do think a man is so stupid; they can't see anything that isn't right down before them in black and white, can they?"

Hope thought Uncle Mac had been able to see a little more than that, but she would not contradict; she only laughed, a little rippling laugh of perfect, full content, and Mrs. Clay went on:

"I always said anybody that wasn't a goose might have known what Mac thought that morning when you were here together, six months ago. And you, you little hypocrite, pretending not to understand anything about it, but fussing over Tyke, and walking away as coolly and indifferently as if a quarter of an hour with

Captain Cayley was not of the least consequence to you. Oh, but it wouldn't do, Hope. I could see as well could be. A woman always can, when she has once been through it herself. I remember when John used to come to my aunt's house, before we were engaged. I nearly always knew when he was coming, and I used to think about it hours and hours before, and pull out my ribbons and things to try which I looked prettiest in, and settle what I would say to him, and how I would behave. And I used to sit at my window, looking away to that turn at the end of the Matchborough road, where he came in sight first, and then I slipped away into the garden, and pretended to be tying up the flowers; and when he came and shook hands with me I looked as surprised as if I had not known a bit about it. Oh! what stories we women do tell!—

at least act them. I wonder if it is very wrong?"

"Not a bit. A story is only a story when you tell it to shift blame from yourself to somebody else, or to get other people into trouble that doesn't belong to them. That is the essence of a lie."

And Hope thought of Madolin Lauderdale's secret, safe as though it slept with her beneath the church stones. How different that life, with its dark under-current of misery and wrong, from this, simple, innocent, love-lighted, which was babbling on at her side; just babbling on out of its brimming content, with no mysteries, no concealed bitternesses, nothing that the sunshine need fear to look down into. And she thought of the terrible strife, the pain shut down so bravely from the world, the longing for something better, over-mastered at last by force of evil nature and evil

inheritance. And she wondered how, in that great day when God shall judge human souls, less by what they have done than by what they struggled against in the doing of it, the convict's wife and the doctor's would stand.

But Mrs. Clay, knowing nothing of these under-currents, thinking that Hope's quietness was all for sweet love-thought musing on its own happiness, chattered brightly on.

"I don't think it is wrong. Of course a woman doesn't want a man to know that she is building castles in the air about him; though how in the world they are ever to get to the length of an engagement, unless she has been building them a very great deal, I can't tell. I'm sure I knew as well as could be that I loved John, and I didn't feel a bit vexed with myself, either. I only felt vexed when he made me own it, because then I didn't seem to belong to myself

any more, and he began just a very little bit to take things for granted; as if, you know, it was my place to be loving and obedient, and all that sort of thing, instead of thinking I did him a great favour when I smiled upon him. Ah, well! never mind; it's what we all have to come to."

"And when we come to it, I suppose no one knows how happy it is."

"No, they don't," said good little Mrs. Clay, emphatically. "Hope, I am so glad for you. You will make such a jewel of a wife. And then, you know, your mantle will fall upon Tossie, so that John need not be disappointed."

"No, it won't; at least, not in the way you mean. Tossie intends to have quite a different sort of mantle, I fancy."

"What, do you mean she is going to take a situation again?"

"Well, yes, for a little while, until she

and the mantle are ready for each other."

"Was it the cap? I know that cap was a great trouble to her; and I don't wonder, either, with her pretty, shining hair, that wanted to tumble about all over in ringlets."

"No, it wasn't the cap; it was Fred Rayson, one of the under-gardeners at the Chase. Poor Tossie! I might have known that her heart would not break when the photographer went away. She only flattened down for a little while, and thought she should like to give up the world, and wear one of those nice neat serge dresses, as a sort of balm for her disappointment. But, you know, she came home about a month ago, and found that she could love Fred a little bit, even yet. They used to be fond of each other when first she went to the Chase, only the photographer looked more like a gentleman. And, about a week ago,

she came to the hospital to ask me if I shouldn't like to take a servant out with me to Canada."

"Well, then, they have had a quarrel already. I don't see what kind of a mantle that can lead to."

"Wait awhile. Mac told me in one of his last letters that Rayson was going out to be employed upon his farm. Active, honest young men can get almost any wages out there."

"Oh! I see. And Tossie wants to go out as your maid, and she will be laying up a little money, and then in a year or two they will be married. Oh! how nice; ever so much nicer than if she had given herself up to the cap and the serge dress. And besides, why shouldn't a girl be able to love more than once? I don't believe in that sort of thing at all. I had lots of fancies for other people before I married John, and I

don't think I was any worse for them. There is a great deal of nonsense in what people say about supreme attachments. If a girl can't marry her first love, let her marry her second, or her third, or her fourth, or as far on as you like."

Hope only smiled. It was no use arguing with pretty little Mrs Clay, who knew as much about what may be called the deep things of life as she did about vernal and autumnal equinoxes. For her, spring came when the snowdrops came, and love came when a lover came, let ever so many have come before him. And yet what a good wife she was—what a charming hostess and clever housekeeper; and what husband in all the parish round looked so happy and contented and proud as her John, who had been brave enough to ask and have when other men as good had only sighed and longed at a distance? For her, marriage was the crown

of a woman's life. A sensible woman might get on and be comfortable with almost any man, so long as he was steady and kind and gentlemanly and prosperous; and as for loving once for all, and having done with it, why, that was simply ridiculous. She could have been just as happy with somebody else, if Providence had not ordered it that she should be happy with John. And so she entered with all her cheery common-sense little soul into Tossie's prospects.

"I am so glad. And what a mercy that man did go away! Everyone said afterwards that he was Jetsam, so it must be true. Why, who could tell but he might have had a wife somewhere either in this country or out in Australia? You never know about such people. Just fancy, now, if she had thrown herself away upon him. I pity any one who had the misfortune to belong to such a man, don't you?"

“I do indeed,” said Hope. And she thought of that long agony which the lightning-stroke had ended.

“Ah! you may well set your lips together in that way. When a girl knows what it is to be engaged to an honest man like Mac, she can’t bear to think of others throwing themselves away upon people who will never do them any good. And that made me so glad when I knew it was all settled between you and Captain Cayley. I felt sure from the first he was a real man; that you would be as safe as if you had married St. Paul’s cathedral. He will never fail, nor crumble to pieces, nor get wrong, however much people may suspect him. I said to John it was all nonsense when that disagreeableness came out about the money. I was as sure Mac wouldn’t make away with a penny as I should be sure of it about John himself. No, Hope, you

are all right, and I believe Tossie is, too."

"And you give us your blessing?"

"Yes; and if Tossie had married him before he went out, she should have had the wedding-breakfast, too, from my house. I do like to have to do with a wedding, even if it is only one of the maids. And what a pretty little bride she will make! A nice lilac muslin will be the thing for her, because it will wash and look as good as new, and suitable to her station, too. Dear me! I can see her in it as plainly as I could see you in the white silk, if it hadn't been for going out to the far West."

"Yes; it is too bad of the far West to come between me and my *gros de Naples* in that spiteful way. And to think how exquisite a common-place little brown thing like myself would have looked in it, too!"

"You are not common-place. What do you think Miss Griselda once said? I

wouldn't have told you it for the world, Hope, if she had been living at the Chase now, or if you hadn't had happiness enough of your own to have floated you over the disagreeableness of it. I was calling there last summer, after Miss Lauderdale had had her illness, and Miss Griselda was talking about you. She said she was walking in the park one day, and saw you at a distance, and actually mistook you for a lady. Insufferable, wasn't it? Miss Griselda used to say things sometimes that made me want to box her ears."

"I don't care a bit. Nobody ever could mistake me for a lady."

"My dear Hope! what do you mean?"

"I mean that I couldn't be *mis*-taken for a lady, because I am one in reality; and so, if dear Miss Griselda took me for one, it was not a mistake. I am fifty times more a lady than Miss Griselda; because I know how to

respect the meanest body in the world, if there is a noble human soul in it."

"You proud little thing! And what a curious way of putting it! But I am sure you are quite right. John said from the first you were as good as any of them, but he always knows a lady when he sees her. I scolded him once for raising his hat to my dressmaker, when we were driving through Matchborough."

"Because you thought he had mistaken her for a lady?"

"Now, Hope, don't be sharp. No, I didn't think he had mistaken her, because he had been with me two or three times just then; I was having a new black satin made, with the loveliest bugle trimming, so he could not help recognising her. He said something which I could not understand, about a man respecting the ladyhood in every woman. John has funny notions,

you know, but she really is a very nice person."

"Almost as nice a 'person' as I am."

"Hope, you are too bad. If you take me up in that way, I won't help you to choose a single thing when you buy your wedding-clothes, and then see what a muddle you will be in! Your silks will cut right through, and your calicoes will fray, and your stockings will drop into holes in the first wash, and your gloves will come unstitched, and your dresses will all be old-fashioned, because you have not a bit of notion yourself how to give directions about having them made."

"What a prospect! Mrs. Clay, I drop you this very minute, and I promise never to take you up again so long as we both shall live."

"My dear, don't be irreverent. The

Scriptures ought never to be used in that way."

"It isn't the Scriptures."

"Isn't it? I'm sure I always thought it was. At any rate it's a service, and that is just the same to me. You can't expect a blessing if you don't pay proper respect to things."

"What things? Such things, for instance, as Miss Griselda's ideas of ladyhood?"

"Hope, if you come down upon Mac in that way, he will be afraid of you, and then you will never get on together. A man can't love a woman when he is afraid of her. Do let me give you just one little hint about that. Because, you know, though I'm not clever myself, I've seen people who are, and it isn't a bit of use if they don't keep it out of sight. Men don't like sharpness in a woman, unless they are sharper still themselves, and then it is just something pleasant to

rub against. If I were ever so clever, I would never let John know it. I would only let him know how sweet and kind and pleasant and well dressed I was, and keep the cleverness out of sight. It takes all the romance out of life when you beat a man upon his own ground. Don't do it, Hope. And now——”

But into what further depths of domestic wisdom that “now” might have led, must remain for ever a mystery. For just then Dr. Clay joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUT Mrs. Clay had her own way in this —that Hope only returned to the hospital to take her leave of duty there, and then came back to the doctor's house at Nunthorpe, to enter upon the much more satisfactory curriculum of domestic education; after passing which she was to take the degree of matrimony, with all honours and emoluments pertaining thereto.

How Mrs. Clay rejoiced in her pupil's progress through that curriculum! With what ardour she initiated her into the arts of presiding at dinner-tables, giving evening-

parties, or concocting chat for morning-callers; because, as she said, there was no telling what might happen; people did not always stop in the far West to the end of the chapter. And then the shopping. What more delightful than to sit for hours in the midst of silks, muslins, laces, and cambrics; first of all choosing dresses, then picking out ribbons and flowers to suit them, or bonnets to wear with them, and mantles or shawls which should bring the whole into harmony. Mrs. Clay had never had such a treat since the preparations for her own wedding, fifteen years ago; and then, as she very justly said, there were so many other things to think about, that she could scarcely give her mind to the drapery enough to enjoy it thoroughly.

But best of all were the long, quiet winter evenings, when the doctor nodded in his chair, or pored over medical books

in the study, and the plain sewing could therefore be brought out from its hiding-place, and Hope and Mrs. Clay stitched away so industriously, stopping now and then to talk the bride-elect's prospects more clearly into shape, or to adjust some little hitch in the wedding arrangements. And sometimes Hope was left quite alone, whilst calls were made, or guests entertained; and then what room for fancy to paint its pleasant pictures upon that untried but so bright future! Were ever such sweet thoughts stitched into unconscious cotton and linen as those which thronged the girl's brain then? Or were ever set side by side with them such sad memories as those which came sometimes when Hope remembered all that had come to her during her visit to the Chase, all that she had learned of life's brightness, and its possible misery? And that lonely death ending the bitterness and

the pain! Yet for those who, like Madolin, had known the loneliness of life, surely that of death could bring but little dread.

Hope used to think such thoughts as these, and then Mrs. Clay would bustle in with a new recipe for a pudding, which must be copied at once into the household book; or the fashions had come, and Hope must have that brown silk of hers made with the new style of sleeve—"Just like this, look." And Mrs. Clay pointed to some impossible model of loveliness in *Le Follet*. "You have such round, plump arms, it is a thousand pities for you ever to wear a dress with closed sleeves. And then, you know, it gives such a nice opportunity for a bit of pretty lace. I insist upon open sleeves, Hope."

Just as Madolin had insisted upon scarlet geraniums once. What a long time ago!

So the winter passed on, and the days

began to lengthen just a little, and the burst of excitement with which the new Baronet had been welcomed to Nunthorpe Chase died out, and the triumphal arches were pulled down, and the laurels swept away, and the paper roses reserved for possible weddings or school treats in the future. The church was no longer filled with people from surrounding parishes, who came to see young Lady Lauderdale in her bridal beauty, fair, radiant, overflowing with love and happiness, saying her prayers out of that same velvet-covered prayer-book over which Madolin's white, proud face had so often bent in utter weariness and despair.

But if people did not go to see the bride, they did to see the window which Miss Griselda, now Mrs. Dewar of Regency Square, Brighton, had placed at the east end of the church, in affectionate remembrance of her brother, Sir David Lauder-

dale, Baronet, and his only child, Madolin. A most beautiful window, so everybody said, with a saint in the middle compartment, and a kneeling figure on each side, and the Lauderdale crest on the top. A line of old English text underneath, most difficult to read, but for that very reason impressing itself more permanently upon the memory when once mastered, stated the donor's name and her reasons for placing the window there.

It might be only because the church door was open, that a shabby-looking man strolled in one Saturday afternoon, when the sexton's wife was busy sweeping and dusting. He had attempted to go into the park first, but Bessie's sister, who was keeping house whilst Bessie and Jacob went to Matchborough market, refused him admission. The family, she said, were very particular about having the place kept private, and

there was a back way for servants and tradespeople.

At which the man shrugged his shoulders, and laughed, impudent fellow! And then he wanted to ask questions about the Chase people, but Jane was a prudent woman, and would none of him. She knew nothing about other folk's affairs, she said; she was only there to take care of the gates whilst her sister was away. He had best ask at some of the shops.

So he turned into the church, a picturesque remnant of antiquity, which the modern rage for restoration had as yet left untouched. And indeed restoration would have been difficult, seeing that the place had grown bit by bit, window by window, arch by arch, as some penitent noble, or rich old burgher, or well-disposed bishop of the middle ages had a sin to cover, or a debt of grace to pay, or a fat benefice to give

thanks for. And the sin had been covered by a richly-carved capital, thick with leaf and fruit and springing flower; and the debt of grace had been paid by an early English window, simple, severe, graceful, with no coat of arms, for the good burgher hadn't one; and the fat benefice had been given thanks for by a decorated chantry, with the old bishop's tomb in the middle. And in dusty corners bits of Norman work lingered, and shreds of carved oak; and there was a beautiful old rood-screen, almost dropping to pieces, but more exquisite in its decay than anything which modern art could invent; and beyond this rood-screen, in the chancel, were the Lauderdale monuments, with dust of age and stain of mildew upon them all, save one, a white marble tablet, bearing record of the five latest deaths which had emptied the grand old house at Nunthorpe Chase.

There they lay, those old Lauderdale people, their lives played out, their story told, their bones crumbling below, their effigies carved in stone above. Some under sumptuous Gothic canopies, some on the tops of marble sarcophagi, face upward to the groined and bossy roof. Here was a knight in chain-mail, with sword and shield by his side ; there a stately dame in ruff and high-crowned hat, saying her prayers ; next, a babe in stony swaddling-clothes, its unworn style and title proclaimed above ; then a bishop, full-robed, hands clasped upon his crozier, loosened mitre, quite done with now, carved beneath. Last of all the white marble tablet, and, low down upon that, the latest story which needed to be told in Nunthorpe church of the Lauderdale people :

“ ALSO MADOLIN,
Only child of the above Sir David Lauderdale,
Who died Sept. 19th, 18—,
Aged 29.”

“Also Madolin.”

Jetsam stood before that marble tablet a long time. So that was the end. Madolin was dead. No need to come to the Chase any more for money now. No proud, calm woman to be cowed into submission by threats of exposure and disgrace. He must make his own way now, and earn his own living and make false promises to some other suffering wretch; for that little sentence, “Died Sept. 19th,” lay between him and a most easy way of winning gold.

September 19th. Jetsam stood and thought. September the 19th. The very day month that he had come down to Nunthorpe Chase for the last time. At noon of that day Madolin had given him the money. She was not ill then, nor weak, nor ailing. How proudly she had stood before him, her black eyes flashing scorn, for all she spoke so meekly, as became the

wife of a man who could crush and ruin her with a word ! And most earnestly she had claimed his promise to leave her from that day forth, never to stand in her presence again, or by spoken or written word break silence between them. And as earnestly he had promised, and then left her to go away, but not to New Zealand or America. Oh ! no ; with a thousand pounds in his pocket, why need a man take tedious sea voyages, or brave trouble or privation in new countries ? He had had his share of that sort of thing whilst picking oakum and mending roads in Australia ; he was not disposed to go in for it again, simply to keep his promise to a woman out of whom he had power to wring money whenever he chose.

Not to New Zealand or America then, but to London, there to enjoy himself after such fashion as he could ; to eat and drink and

be merry, whilst his money lasted; and perhaps win a little more to it in some of the gambling-houses.

To win or to lose. And it had chanced to be losing. And now the thousand pounds wasted away, he had come back to his wife for more. But instead of help forced out of her misery, he found that the misery was over. Those little words stood between him and any more money from the proud lady of Nunthorpe Chase.

“Died Sept. 19th.”

Had she killed herself, then? There was spirit enough in her to do it. She was of the sort that could go quietly enough to death, when death came to be better than disgrace. Only it was a bad thing for him. And besides, why put herself away just when she might have thought there was a little peace and rest for her? Their secret was between themselves.

He had never told it. Would she?

Jetsam leaned against one of the old Lauderdale knights, opposite Sir David's tablet, and thought over all these things.

CHAPTER XX.

“YOU seem to have some nice monuments here,” he said, as the sexton’s wife, broom and duster in hand, came from the vestry where she had been setting things to rights. “I should think the Lauderdales are rather an important family in these parts.”

The woman looked at him with an air of pitying wonder. As if anyone but the most benighted Hottentot or Hindoo might not have known, without much need of thinking about it, that the Lauderdales were an important family in these parts.

But he was only a stranger, poor man ! and must be dealt kindly with.

“ Well, yes, sir,” she said, after a rapid general survey of him. “ I reckon you won’t find a many that’s more thought of. There isn’t nobody about here that can come near-hand them for quality. That one yonder, sir,” and she pointed to a mailed knight in the corner,” was the first of them that had the title, though they’d been a deal respected at Nunthorpe long before that Sir Guy Lauderdale as built the Chase. Him with the armour, sir, and his helmet and gloves hung up over him, as you can see ’em if you look pretty well up to the roof; and since his time there’s never been a Lauderdale wanting to keep things as they ought to be kept.”

“ Indeed ! A very old family.”

“ I should think so, sir, and always were, and knew what belonged to the quality. But

never a one as I've heard of, to beat him that come to the Chase last Christmas, new married, and carrying on and feasts for everybody. Poor old Sir David was very good, as times go, and always milk at the dairy for them that wanted it, and beer and blankets and that sort at Christmas; but never no company, and the Chase shut up for three years too, at least if it wasn't shut up, it was just as good, for some people took it as wasn't the right sort for such a place; coal and timber, folks said, and nothing but what they made for themselves; and nobody took no notice of them, as wasn't likely they should. It was as much as I could put up with to see them sitting in the Chase pew of a Sunday, with their silks and their satins, as you never see the quality decked out that way for church, and fingering the prayer-books as belonged to their betters, and giving themselves such

airs, while one might have thought they'd done the place a favour by coming to it. Such rubbish!"

And the woman gave her duster a fillip. She had not been sexton's wife at Nunthorpe parish church for five-and-thirty years, without knowing what belonged to her place.

Jetsam, with his hands in his pockets, strolled about the chancel. This gossiping old lady was just the person for him. Well disposed to talk, he would let her have her fill of it. By-and-by she would work her way to that white marble tablet, and tell him something about it. He need not hurry her. She, on her part, had been looking somewhat keenly at him as she went on with her story. Not quite to be called a poor man, nor yet the sort from whom shillings and half-crowns might be expected. And evidently not a person who knew or cared much

about the grandeur of the Lauderdale family. But when one has had a new window put into one's church, and when a remarkable death has recently happened in the great family of the place, one naturally likes to talk.

"We was all glad when Sir David come back," she continued. "He'd got into trouble with some bank mischief, and had to leave the place to get himself straight. We looked for a bit of gaiety when we'd fetched 'em back again, but we didn't get it. There was never no company kept, nor nothing after that. The place was as still as still. You might have thought they was all waiting for their deaths."

"Maybe he wasn't rich enough," said Jet-sam. "You have some fine stained glass here."

"Yes, sir, a deal of people comes to see the windows; but it wasn't because he was

so poor that the place was kept so quiet. Everybody laid the blame upon the young lady, her as lies buried there, where you see the name on that stone. She was so proud and shut up like, and seemed to take no interest in nothing, after they come back. Some said one thing, and some said another, but it was never properly cleared up why she was set that way. It was always my thinking that her father had come between her and somebody she wanted to wed."

"Perhaps," said Jetsam, tapping old Sir Guy's monument with his cane. But he thought what a different thing life might have been for that proud wife of his, if her father *had* come between her and the "somebody" she wanted to wed. "And so she is dead now."

"Yes, sir, and I should say it was such a death as you never heard tell of in all your days, no, nor mightn't again if you lived to be

as old as Methusalem. To think of her being found there under that tree, with her lovely crape all spoiled, and her black silk dripping wet. There was many a one out of this parish used to come to see the spot at first, and never a mark upon her to tell how she come by her death."

"Did she poison herself, then?"

"Poison herself, sir! What are you talking about? As if any of the Lauderdales ever slipped themselves off in that vulgar way! It wouldn't have been worthy of them, and they was always a family that knew what belonged to them. No, sir, if you please, Miss Lauderdale didn't poison herself, nor nothing of the sort. She'd just walked out into the avenue after dinner, and there came on a storm such as hadn't been in these parts for many a year, and she went under a tree for shelter, and the lightning took and struck her dead there—

as if there wasn't nothing commoner for it to spend its spite upon! I wouldn't have said nothing if it had been a sheep, or a tree, or aught of that sort, as it stands to reason something must be struck; but to take and hit the very lady of the place, when all the Lauderdales before her, let alone them as fell for their country in battle, had died in their beds, like Christians—it was more than one looked for. There was a deal of talk about it.”

“I should think there would be; and her father dead, too.”

“Yes, sir, he'd died about a month before, and people did say it was trouble took him off. You see, he'd been robbed of a deal of money—over a thousand pounds in bank-notes—out of the iron chest, and nobody ever found out how it went; and it worried him so as he couldn't stand again' it at his time of life, and he give in and died,

after he'd only been laid up a matter of two days, or thereabouts. And a splendid funeral they had for him, too. I wouldn't wish to see a handsomer, if it was Royalty itself."

Two days, or thereabouts. Jetsam looked at the date upon the tablet. Just a week from the time Madolin had given him that thousand pounds; and all in bank-notes, too. So that was the way the brave woman had got them. And had she been found out, and in her desperation had she destroyed herself? He must let the sexton's wife talk on a little longer; it would be worth while. He took out his purse; she seemed to understand, and went on dusting. She had previously shown signs of having finished her work.

"Poor man! How very sad! But one might think they would have set the police to work."

“Well, sir, you see, Sir David dying made a difference. There was a deal of talk about a Captain Cayley making away with it; and from what people said, things looked very black against him; but nobody here, as ever I heard tell of, took it up to believe it of him, for he was as brave a gentleman as ever you set eyes upon, and lodged with me for a good bit, and never gave no trouble, nor stopped out at nights, and always a pleasant smile and a look, and his bills paid reg’lar to the minute, and always ready to face you, as straightforward as a pin, which isn’t the way of a man that has his eye on somebody else’s money.”

All the time Jetsam was pacing about the chancel, reading the mouldering inscriptions on the Lauderdale tombs, but always pausing longest before the tablet on which those two last deaths, following each other so closely, were recorded. How much he

could have told the sexton's wife, had he been as fond of talking as herself! What strange story unfolded about that grand old family at the Chase; what stain cleared away from an honest man's name, to fix it—where?

And well for him that he let her talk. By-and-by she dropped a piece of information which concerned him much. She, too, was strolling round amongst the monuments, switching off a streak of dust here and there, stopping occasionally from her work to give her attention more undividedly to conversation.

“Nobody believed it of him that he was a man who would have made away with a penny that wasn't his own; and if it hadn't been for Sir David and Miss Lauderdale being took as you may say promiscus, with no time to leave directions nor nothing, there'd have been a stir made, more than

what there was. People talked a deal about a man that was prowling round about the Chase just then, taking picturs, and saying Miss Lauderdale had give him leave to come in, which wasn't a likely thing, and him the sort he was; and she always so partickler about strangers coming into the park. I've known her turn sharp round and walk right away back, if she'd seen anybody ever so far off, she was that vexed at not been left to herself. And for her to tell a man he might come in whenever he'd a mind to, it wasn't likely."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"Well, sir, I never see him myself, but nobody had any good to say for him. Slouching about and skulking and prowling. Jacob Lund at the lodge gates told me a deal, and he'd the best right to know, for the man oft used to go in there to get things for his work, or have a bit of talk; and there

were some that said he'd got his eye upon Jacob's daughter Tossie, as pretty a girl as ever stepped, and a deal too good for the likes of him. And I believe the way it first come to be talked about that he'd had anything to do with the money, was him dropping a paper at the lodge, with some figures upon it, and writing, which folks said belonged to Sir David. And then Captain Cayley met him in the park, and knew him for the same as traped about on the beach at Brighton, taking portraits. And Mrs. Regison, that Sir David had given leave to walk about in the grounds, said he was the same she'd seen years and years ago, somewhere abroad, the thief that got Sir David into trouble at the bank, and then served his seven years transportation for it. Miss Griselda was right mad when she heard tell of that, but he was safe off."

"Who was Miss Griselda?"

“Sir David’s sister, as oft used to come and stay at the Chase for company’ to Miss Lauderdale. It all came out by a bit at a time, and one got to know about it, and then another, and a many said none but him had robbed the money. But Sir David was dead then, and Miss Lauderdale wouldn’t stir a bit about it, for the why and the wherefore nobody could tell. And then you see she was took herself, and that ended everything. Or else there might have been a stir.”

“And nobody knows anything about it yet?”

“No, sir, nor ever will, I should say ; for it’s been left to drop through this well on to six months past, and you never hear a word said, for Captain Cayley, as had all the disagreeableness at first, is away back to Canada, and Miss Griselda is married, and never comes to the Chase. I shouldn’t

wonder, though, if the man ever showed up again, and anybody knew him for the same, there'd be something done, for Mr. Scoles the lawyer says it's a thing as ought to be looked into."

"You say you never saw him."

"No, sir, I didn't, and no loss neither, him being the sort he was, but there's a many here would know him again, for he had a queer look with him, they say, and never looked anyone straight in the face; which is always a bad sign, my husband says."

Jetsam walked away, first putting a sixpence into the woman's hand.

"Shan't you like to see the new window, sir?" she said, "it as Miss Griselda put up to old Sir David and his daughter. Here's a party coming in now, and one telling would do for all."

But Jetsam only thanked her, and made

his way out through the vestry, wisely avoiding the party who were coming in at the other end of the church. The sooner he was away from Nunthorpe now, the better.

He skulked across some meadows and over a common, to the nearest station, two miles away, not choosing to run the risk of being recognised in the village. Later in the evening he returned to London, inquired after a ship, and meeting with one, worked his passage out to New Zealand. After that, no one in Nunthorpe saw or heard anything more of Madolin Lauderdale's husband.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the late spring—for, after all, in spite of Mrs. Clay's protestations to the contrary, the snowdrops had come and gone before Mac could get away from his home in the far West—there was a very quiet little wedding at the parish church of Nunthorpe. More than quiet; absolutely uninteresting, Mrs. Regison said, who happened to be passing through the churchyard with her daughter Gertrude as the two couples, Dr. Clay and Hope Meredith first, Mrs. Clay and Uncle Mac behind, crossed over from the doctor's garden. No bridesmaids,

no company, no white favours, no flutter of lace or feathers or flowers; the most commonplace affair that was ever got together in the shape of a wedding; no wonder that they tried to keep it so snug, nobody knowing either the day or the hour when it was to take place.

"But then, you know, my dear," Mrs. Regison said, "she was only in a very second-rate situation at the hospital, scarcely earning as much, I daresay, as would pay for her outfit; and people must consider their circumstances. It is very kind of Mrs. Clay to have acted as a mother to her, but I must say, if she meant to do the thing at all, she might have done it a little more handsomely."

"I think so, indeed, mamma. Of course I did not take any notice of them as we passed, but I'm sure eightpence a yard would have bought that trumpery white

muslin ; and the flowers in the bouquet were positively out of the hedgerows—wild hyacinths and anemones—did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous? And to think of the wedding that there might have been, if only Captain Cayley had been wise enough to choose the right lady.”

“ Ah ! poor Miss Lauderdale ! Well, let us hope she is better off now.” And Mrs. Regison looked complacently round upon the tombstones.

Somehow, one always feels in a churchyard that the people lying there *are* better off, even while wedding-bells are ringing, and sunlight flashing upon bridal joy. And when there is no orange-blossom, and only eightpenny white muslin going through the marriage ceremony, it is comparatively easy for the Mrs. Regisons of society to believe that the dead are supremely blest.

“ I wonder if she would have had him ? ”

said that lady, coming above ground again after a little use of her pocket-handkerchief. "The Lauderdale's were always such a proud set."

"Oh! Mamma, there was no question about that; only I told you, six months ago, that, if ever he took a wife out with him at all, it would be Hope Meredith. I could see it from the first. He had eyes for no one else. But Miss Lauderdale would have liked it very much, and so would Miss Griselda. It was Miss Meredith's unlucky visit to the Chase that did it all."

"Yes. People ought to be very careful whom they invite to their houses. Miss Meredith was quite lifted out of her station when she was made of so much importance during Miss Lauderdale's illness. However, it has ended well enough for her. Poor Captain Cayley cannot think, though, that he has made a very good match. You know

she will never be received in society."

"I am not sure. Ladies of any sort are at a premium out there. It is so very different from England, where birth and breeding come before everything else. Of course Captain Cayley would never have married her, if he had been staying in this country. And then he went away under a cloud himself last year. I almost wonder he liked to come back at all, when the thing was not completely cleared up. And after having given up his appointment, too, which looked so very guilty. Mrs. Clay said it was offered to him again, but he declined it."

"Which looks guiltier still. I wonder if he and that man Jetsam were in collusion? It was rather strange, their both being about the place at the time the money disappeared. But really the affair seems a century old. I had given over remembering it, long ago. Shall we go on with our walk, or should you

like to stay and see this exquisite wedding party come out of the church?"

"Oh! no, thank you, mamma, I am abundantly satisfied, though they all look immensely happy, poor things! in spite of the paltry turn out. Mrs. Clay is one of those shallow people who are just in their element at a wedding. It is such a ridiculous weakness. Let us go round by the park gates; perhaps we shall see Lady Lauderdale taking her drive, and she does wear the prettiest bonnets. Dear me! what a change, to be sure, from poor old Sir David's time!"

"Also of Madolin."

A beam of sunlight, smiting upon Hope as she stood before the altar at her husband's side, glanced across the chancel and fell upon those words. Hope read them once more. None but herself and another

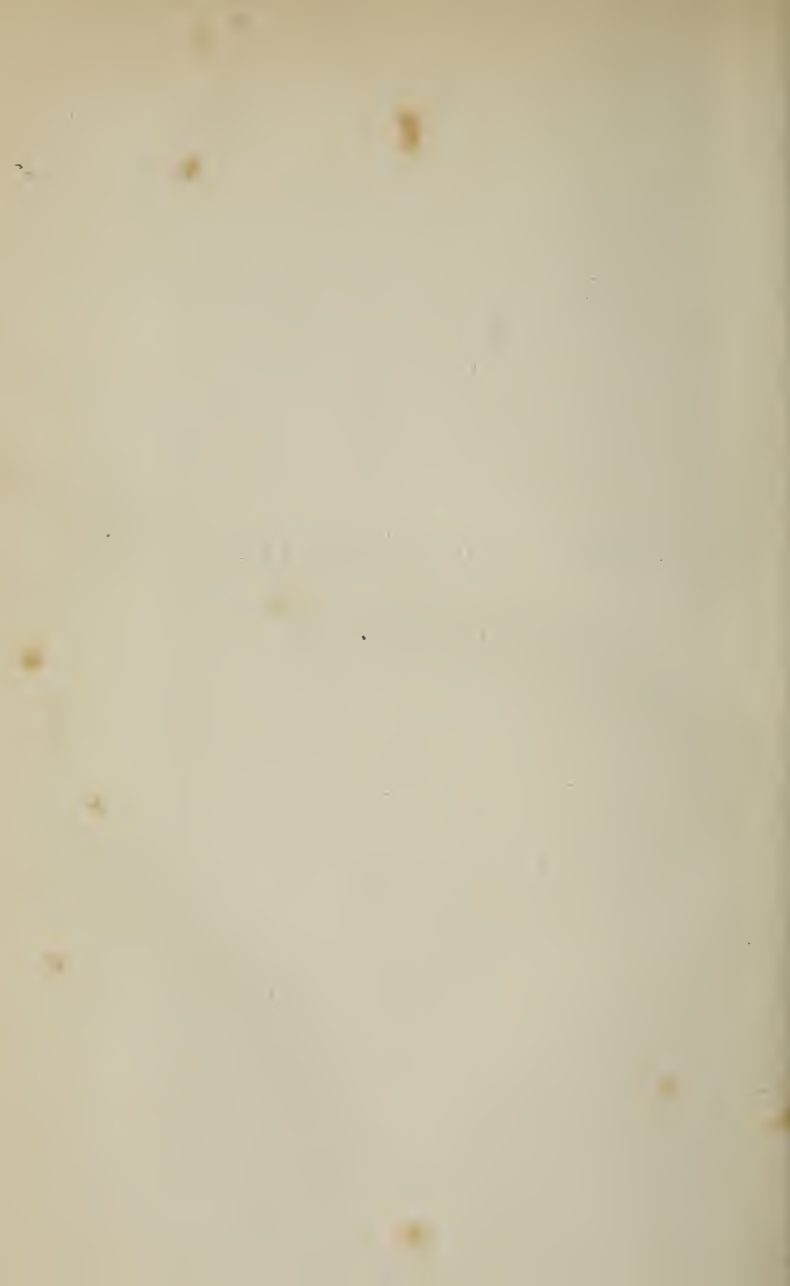
knew the story of the woman who slept below. But for that strange bridal in the little church of St. Elma, there had never been this, so full of joy and peace. But for another's sin, her own happiness had not come to pass.

So they came out together, Hope and her husband, into the sweet April noon. And as no white-froaked school-children reached forward to scatter flowers at the bride's feet, the hawthorn-tree near the churchyard gate bent its blossom-full branches, and let fall upon her head a snowy veil which queen or princess might have been proud to wear.

THE END.



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